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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF TRANSFER STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES
WITH COACHING AND ADVISING AT A LARGE METROPOLITAN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education
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ABSTRACT

The number of students transferring from state colleges to state universities in Florida is significant due to the articulation agreements that are supported by the Board of Governors. These agreements allow students who have completed an associate degree to transfer their credits toward a bachelor's degree at a state university. However, transfer students face numerous barriers including academic, financial, and personal that hinder their success as they transition and start their first year at the state university. A large metropolitan public university in Florida has implemented success coaching, a new model of holistic student support, and advising services to provide targeted guidance and advising for transfer students. Some of these services start while the students are at the state college to facilitate the transfer process and allow them to be successful at the state university. The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of transfer students to get an insight regarding the obstacles they battle and determine whether these services were effective in helping students overcome challenges. To this end, this study is embedded within Schlossberg's Transition Theory and utilizes a qualitative approach to allow important insights to emerge from the student perspective. The researcher conducted and video recorded in-depth interviews with 11 transfer students in their first year at the state university who have utilized the transfer and advising services provided by the university. The data was then transcribed, reviewed, and coded resulting in several themes relating to the first and second research question. The findings of this study are discussed within the context of the existing literature and the theoretical framework. Implications for higher education institutions as well as recommendations for future research are presented.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

In the state of Florida, there is a deep commitment to transfer articulations between state colleges and state universities. Students who complete a two-year associate of arts (A.A.) degree at a state college can get admission into one of the twelve state universities as a junior and complete a bachelor's degree (Floridashines, 2020). The transfer articulation agreement in Florida grants "seamless" access for many students into state universities and the transfer of the sixty credits they have completed at the state college. This would allow students to earn their bachelor's degree after completing two years at the state university thus making state colleges a gateway to earning a bachelor's degree because of their affordable tuition fees and their open admission policies that allow any student with a high school degree to pursue a college education (Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006). According to Florida College Access Network's brief (2018), two thirds of students who earn an associate in arts (AA) from a state college in Florida will move on to enroll in a state university of which sixty-eight percent earn a bachelor's degree in four years or less.

According to Wellman (2002), the transfer agreements are critical because they provide students with access and equity by providing an opportunity for low-income and minority students for getting a bachelor's degree. Additionally, they contribute to the skilled workforce, reduce high education costs for students, and improve degree completion (Senie, 2015). The two-year bachelor's degree program completion rate at a state university for students who have earned their associate of arts (AA) degree in a Florida state college has been tied to the performance metrics (Florida College Access Network, 2018). This has put pressure on institutions to ensure students' retention (Dougherty et al., 2014). Cornelius and Cavanaugh

(2016) affirm that the Florida state government leadership and the Board of Governors are determined to promote retention and improve completion rates. As a result, state universities have been utilizing academic support programs and allocating various resources to enhance services and experiences.

Support services for transfer students facilitate the transfer process and promote success through offering academic advising, planning, and preparedness. Through such programs, state universities support the transfer students in dealing with challenges of starting at a state university, shape their experience positively, and provide them with a pathway to completion and success. One of the ways state universities have been facilitating the transfer experience and improving the support services for transfer students is through hiring success coaches, as well as academic advisors. The success coaches provide holistic support to students before and through the transfer process while they are still attending the state college. The success coaches lead students through the transfer process, provide motivation, and offer success strategies and resources (Host Institution, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

With more focus on transfer articulation agreements between state colleges and state universities, researchers and scholars have put more emphasis on developing a better understanding of the various aspects of the process to suggest recommendations. The study of the literature has reflected multiple studies examining the policies pertaining to transfer articulation agreements, their continuing viability, and the role of transfer partnerships in supporting transfer students obtain their bachelor's degree (Bragg, 2020; Falconetti, 2009; Anderson, Sun, & Alfonso, 2006). A considerable body of literature also exists that examines the

transfer process as well as the sequential choice method used in making transfer decisions. This includes the thought process employed and the factors influencing students' decision to transfer and selection of the transfer institution (Mondal & Galbraith, 2015; Jabbar, Epstein, Sánchez, & Hartman, 2021). Additionally, there is an abundance of research examining the transfer culture and the effect of transfer policies as perceived by students or those who developed and constituted the policies including administrators, faculty, and board employees (Senie, 2015; Pyka, 2014).

However, there is limited research focused on understanding the experiences of transfer students with the support services they have received, from the perspective of the transfer students themselves. Transfer students face several barriers that hinder the completion of their degree program in a state university. As stated by Fowler and Boylan (2010), the challenges for transfer students could be academic but also non-academic and personal relating to goal attainment, financial planning, and university preparedness. Transfer students can overcome these obstacles with the help of support services that focus on providing academic direction, admission guidance, transfer assistance, and personal advising including addressing students' attitude, resilience, time management, and other personal factors. The presence of such services could serve as a pathway to success for students who are transferring from a state college to a state university to earn a bachelor's degree through articulation agreements.

The problem being explored in this research study is the challenges transfer students encounter in transitioning to a state university and the role of services and interventions in supporting transfer students to overcome barriers, reach their goals, and enhance their overall educational experience. Therefore, this study will further contribute to the existing limited

research by giving voice and representation to the transfer students to communicate their perception, insights, and experiences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the experiences and perceptions of transfer students with the support services they received before and during their first year at a state university. Utilizing a phenomenological research design, this study specifically focuses on transfer students who have completed an associate degree of arts (AA) or of science (AS) at a state college and then transferred to a state university to complete a bachelor's degree. The transfer is facilitated through degree articulation agreements between the state college and the state university. There is limited literature on the subjective experiences of transfer students and how transfer support services and advising influence their persistence, adjustments, retention, and success through the first year at a state university. This study will contribute to research by exploring the relationship between transfer students experience with support services and their personal and academic adjustment at a state university. Therefore, data collected for this study will provide valuable evidence that will influence whether higher education institutions will devote more transfer support services and allocate more resources.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that it explores the value and effectiveness of transfer support services from the transfer students' perspective. Students' retention and completion are a priority for state universities given that the two are linked to state and federal funding. In her study, Falconetti (2009) reported that transfer students dropped out at a significantly greater rate

than first time in college (FTIC) juniors at three Florida state universities. These findings support the importance of strengthening support services and programs that would target the diverse needs of the transfer students. Thus, it would be crucial to explore the common individual experiences of the transfer students with support services to better understand the complexities associated with transferring to a state university and to have a better insight on how support services could facilitate retention and success.

Furthermore, the results of this study would help identify innovative and effective strategies to supplement articulation agreements and policies. The inter-institutional strategies and innovative advising models will serve not only the transfer students but could alter positively the overall student experience.

Additionally, the in-depth insights provided by the transfer students in this study would help identify gaps in the transfer process. This would be fundamental for higher education institutions to improve upon policies, services, and practices.

Finally, the results of this study could render possible valuable evidence on the effectiveness of support services for transfer students and provide direction on best practices that would further enhance transfer student success rate. University leaders can be strategic in creating and adopting opportunities and programs that would support students overcome challenges and attain their degree. Promoting such practices will help in increasing degree attainment which would boost the overall bachelor's degree awarded, one of the funding benchmarks for state universities in the state of Florida.

Definition of Terms

To provide more clarification and avoid any ambiguity, the terms Florida state universities, Florida state colleges, articulation, transfer students, advisors, success coaches or student coaches, and student support services have been defined.

- Florida State Universities: State universities are public funded universities providing undergraduate and graduate degree programs. “In Florida, the state university system comprises of twelve public institutions. The Board of governors oversees the operation and management of the Florida public university system’s twelve institutions. The Board of Governors is comprised of seventeen members, fourteen of whom are appointed by the Florida Governor and confirmed by the Florida Senate for a term of seven years. The remaining members include the Chair of the Advisory Council of Faculty Senates, the Commissioner of Education, and the Chair of the Florida Student Association.” Each university system institution is led and management by a president who is guided and advised by a “13-member Board of Trustees, of which five citizen members are appointed by the Board of Governors in accordance with the Board’s Trustee Selection and Appointment Process.” (State University System in Florida, 2020)
- Florida State Colleges: “Florida has 28 colleges that are open to everyone and that offer GED training, adult basic education, as well as certificate, associate, and bachelor's degree programs. Certificate and degree programs offered at the colleges range from automotive service technology to nursing to the associate in arts degree, which guarantees transfer to one of Florida's 12 state universities or a Florida College System institution. A large number of colleges are now offering bachelor's degrees in high

demand fields such as Nursing, Technology, and Education.” (Florida Department of Education, 2020)

- Seamless Access: refers to the smooth, consistent, efficient, and “effective progression and transfer of students between and among public postsecondary institutions.” (Florida Department of Education, 2020)
- Articulation: “Articulation refers to the range of processes and relationships involved in the systematic movement of students between and among post-secondary institutions. The goal of articulation is to promote problem-free transfer of courses from one institution to another. It is critical that transfer credit be both accepted by the receiving institution and applied to the student's major in a manner that is not punitive or penalizing in accommodating the diverse needs of transfer students.” (Wright et al., 1996, p. 6)
- Transfer Students: “Transfer students are students who earned an associate in arts degree at a state college and successfully completed sixty semester hours of college credit courses in an established program of study with a GPA of 2.0 and above then matriculated to a four-year state university.” (State University Systems of Florida, 2020)
- Advisors: Advisors are institutional representative who give “insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter. The nature of this direction might be to inform, suggest, counsel, discipline, coach, mentor, or even teach.” (Kuhn, 2011, p.3)
- Success Coaches or Student Coaches: They are professionals who utilize coaching methodologies and case management strategies to provide comprehensive and personalized support that promotes students’ self-advocacy, progress, and successful completion of educational goals. A success coach provides holistic support to students

including new undergraduate students, transfer students, and graduate students to facilitate success, adjustment, and degree completion. (Host Institution HR, 2019)

- Transfer Student Support Services: They are administrative services provided by university personnel, including success coaches and advisors, who identify and serve the needs of the transfer students. By doing so, they facilitate the students' transition, and enhance their overall learning experience.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework guiding this study is Nancy Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984). This theory will provide a more thorough understanding of the experience of transfer students throughout the process of transition from a community college to a state university. Transition is defined as "any event, or non-event, which results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 33).

Schlossberg's transition theory discusses the factors related to transition and changes people face that could affect their lives. These individuals could be adults or traditionally aged college students as the target population of this study. The theory contributes to the understanding of the individual and the environment which would decide the degree to which transition will affect these individuals. It also discusses the support and adaptation strategies that would assist those experiencing change.

This adaptation is also affected by individual perception, environment, and the individuals themselves. Schlossberg emphasized that managing and adjusting to change and transition is influenced by how individuals perceive the transition, the environmental

characteristics, and the individual's personal attributes. This view has later been modified by Schlossberg to include other factors.

The transition could be any event or experience involving change and adjustment. Perception is particularly important and is relative to the person going through the transition, in fact, "a transition is only a transition if it is defined by the person experiencing it." (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012, p. 40).

There are three types of transitions: anticipated transitions, unanticipated transitions, and nonevent transitions (Evans et al., 2010). Anticipated events are predicted and expected transitions that allow individuals to prepare and rehearse the changing role or life event. The transfer students have the expectation that they will complete their AA at a state college and then transfer to a state university. Unanticipated transitions, on the other hand, are not predictable or scheduled. Often individuals are underprepared for these events and decisions are made hastily and in less-than-optimal circumstances. A transfer student might experience death of a family member, unexpected pregnancy, or a loss of employment that could pose challenges and impede their transfer and retention. Finally, the nonevents are those transitions in which individuals plan for and expect to happen, but they do not fall through which could cause stress and change their view of themselves as well as their behavior.

Research Questions

To explore the central phenomenon, this study serves to address the following research questions:

1. What are the transfer students' perceptions of the transfer and advising services they have received before and during their first year at a large metropolitan research university in Florida?
2. What strategies transfer students utilized to overcome their challenges?

Limitations

Limitations are factors beyond the researcher's control that has an "influence on the interpretations of the finding or the generalizability of the results" (Lunenburg and Irby, 2008, p.133). The study focuses on the perceptions of transfer students at a large metropolitan research university in Florida. The study might not be representative of transfer students at other universities in Florida or other states. Additionally, there are other factors that could influence students' retention and success in a state university. These variables could include, but are not limited to, academic, personal, socioeconomic, and family influences. However, the rigorous in-depths interviews and the data analysis should generate themes that are representative of what transfer students experience at other universities and are transferable to large and small higher education institutions. Finally, although qualitative research enriches our understanding of the participants lived experiences, the nature of the study could also allow for potential subjectivity and researcher bias when collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the data. It is important that the researcher is mindful of their biases through reflecting, questioning, and utilizing different strategies to establish the rigor and trustworthiness of the study.

Delimitations

Delimitations are defined as “self-imposed boundaries set by the researcher on the purpose and scope of the study” (Lunenburg and Irby, 2008, p.133). According to Maush and Park (2003), delimitations determine the main variables that are included in and excluded from the study.

In this study, the researcher utilized four delimitations to gain a better understanding of the experiences of transfer students with the transfer support services received. The researcher only explored the perceptions of transfer students who have completed a two-year associate of arts degree at a state college in Florida and transferred through an articulation agreement to a state university to complete two more years and earn their bachelor’s degree. Another delimitation used by the researcher is that the students selected for this study are in their first year and have completed at least one semester at the state university. Finally, the researcher also delimited the inquiry to those students who have received transfer support services before and during their transition from a state college to a state university.

Assumptions

Lunenburg and Irby (2008, p. 135) define assumptions as postulates, premises, and propositions that are accepted as operational for purposes of the research.” The following assumptions were included in this study: (a) the researcher assumed that the participants in this study, the transfer students, have provided an unbiased, factual, and honest perception of their experience with transfer support services; (b) the participants are selected using purposeful sampling thus the researcher can ensure that they have all experienced the same phenomenon being investigated in the study; (c) the interview as a research instrument is scrupulous in

collecting the perception of the transfer students in regards to services received; (d) the themes generated from the data analysis will directly correlate with the conclusions and recommendation of this study.

Organization of the Study

This study is presented in three chapters. In Chapter One, the researcher presented the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, theoretical framework, research questions, limitations and delimitations, and assumptions of the study.

In Chapter Two, the researcher provides a literature review including the higher education in Florida, transfer students, support services, and students' developmental theories.

Finally, Chapter Three presents the methodology of the study including selection of participant and location, research instrument, data collection, and data analysis.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter presents the review of pertinent literature related to transfer students and student support. The chapter starts with a discussion of the challenges that transfer students confront. It explores the personal, psychological, and institutional challenges that substantially impede their transition. Next, this chapter provides an overview of the higher education system in Florida and the role it plays in facilitating the transfer of students and indirectly promoting adequate transfer support services through performance-based funding. Furthermore, this chapter provides a synthesis of the educational research examining the relationship between support services and student experiences, adjustment, and success. Much of the research concludes that there is a positive correlation between support services, student experience, and the students' ability to successfully overcome barriers to success and completion. The chapter concludes with a review of the theoretical foundations that are relevant to this research study on transfer students. Specifically, the review of research includes the following areas: brief overview of the higher education in Florida including Florida state system, transfer articulations, and performance-based funding; coaching in academic settings; advising services and programs; and significant theoretical foundations.

Challenges of Transfer Students

There are common factors that emerge after reviewing relevant literature pertaining to the challenges transfer students face. Challenges influencing the successful transition from the 2-year state college to a 4-year state university include demographics, related to personal characteristics and family circumstances; psychological, associated with transfer shock and

anxiety; and institutional, including academics and policies. (Grites, 2013; Porchea, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010; Huriya, McKinnon-Crowley, & Serrata, 2019).

Personal Challenges

Research on transfer students paid special attention to transfer students' demographics and personal characteristics. There is an overwhelming consensus amongst numerous studies indicating that state colleges constitute a primary point of access to higher education serving a diverse population of students including non-traditional students and students from underserved groups. (Laanan, 2002; Kobena Osam et al., 2017; Pratt, 2017; Porchea, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010; Huriya, McKinnon-Crowley, & Serrata, 2019; De Leone, Sabella, & Van Duzor, 2019; Wellman 2002; Xu et al., 2018). Some researchers argue that the lower-cost academic basics, opportunities for skill acquisition or intellectual exploration, affordability, and flexibility attract students who are considering moving into a four-year state university after obtaining an associate degree (Pratt, 2017; Erisman, & Steele 2015). The Florida college system is no different, in fact, it prides itself in identifying and providing a wide range of high-quality services and academic programs with low-cost making state colleges attractive to this diverse population of students (Florida College System, n.d.). Nonetheless, higher education institutions still ought to be deliberate in supporting these students in navigating their way through 4-year institutions and funding their education (Rosenberg. 2016)

Nontraditional students tend to be older adults and have a full-time jobs, dependents, and family responsibilities that they need to juggle. Some studies stress that non-traditional students are faced with significant challenges and issues related to financials, family obligations, and job commitments. Many of these students hold full time positions and jobs who would typically

benefit from flexible course options, course modalities, and class schedules. These unique challenges could impede the successful transfer of these students to a 4-year university. However, other studies argue that non-traditional students are intrinsically motivated, face less challenges, and can perform academically better than traditional students (Osam, 2017; Taylor & House, 2009). This is supported by the claim that due to their age and additional life experience; they are more goal oriented, experienced, and self-motivated students who are likely to be more persistent in their studies and moving along. Their self-motivation also adds a positive influence on their experiences and adjustment (Cepeda et al, 2021). Regardless of the shifting perspectives, the experiences of students, specifically non-traditional students, can be strengthened by social support, like peers and family, but also from a different type of teaching and learning support at the 4-year university. Such targeted support services can assist them in better navigating the transfer process by affirming their presence, unique needs, identity, and contributions. (Kachur & Barcinas, 2020; Erisman, & Steele 2015; Cepeda et al, 2021).

Additionally, financial issues, including working and paying for expenses, are another area of high concern for transfer students. With state colleges providing access to students from underrepresented communities making the majority of transferring student, many of these students are likely to be members of a racial, low-income, or minority ethnic group (Fischer, 2007). Moreover, scholarships for transfer students are scarce. Although students who transfer from a 2-year state college might be eligible for some institutional aid, it is not sufficient. The process to determine financial aid and find information on funding resources is not seamless (Townsend, 2008). Jabbar et al. (2019) posited that students of color and low-income students might not fully understand the actual cost of tuition and fees. Thus, support services can aid the transfer process for these students by providing accurate information and helping students

understand loans, grants, or scholarships. Despite the argument that support services can facilitate transfer through providing resources and financial literacy, the fact remains that students have found it easier to get financial aid at the state college compared to state university (Rhine et al., 2010). With limited financial resources, one means of supporting students' education is through employment (Smith, 2019) especially as they matriculate to the state university. According to the US Department of Education, it is estimated that 50% of students attending a 2-year state college work, and 35% work more than twenty hours a week (Digest of Education Statistics, 2018). Often, they must work longer hours than their peers depriving them of the university experience, advising, and identifying and utilizing available resources. These students have limited availability to be engaged on campus, invest in professional development opportunities, join clubs and professional associations, or participate in financial literacy programs. Some transfer students might decide that pursuing a bachelor's degree at a state university after completing their associate degree is not a realistic goal and decide against completing their degree (Rhine et al., 2010). To aid transfer students and ease the transfer process and adjustment, school faculty and staff working with transfer students need to be aware of student characteristics and demographics and how some are affected by finances being from working-class backgrounds working full time or part time, first generation, or from ethnically and racially diverse groups (Rhine et al., 2010). The literature concludes that the adjustment of these students positively correlates with the degree of support they receive and their connections and involvement in activities. Therefore, their acclimation would be different than their traditional counterparts who do not come from underserved groups (Fischer, 2007).

Psychological Challenges

Additionally, transfer students transferring from a state college to a 4-year state university face psychological effects including anxiety and transfer shock which could adversely affect their overall academics and quality of life. In a study conducted by Beiter et al. (2014) to assess how common depression, anxiety, and stress are amongst students at a 4-year institution, transfer students exhibited significantly higher levels of anxiety and stress than their peers. The study analyzed that the availability of support services that understands and addresses the specific needs of transfer students is essential. Furthermore, the study found that transfer students' anxiety correlates closely with concerns with academics, self-esteem, campus relationships, financial challenges, and having to move to a new institution in the middle of their higher education studies. Furthermore, their anxiety is associated with their sense of isolation. Students are faced with a different learning environment and expectations that they might not be equipped for which contribute to a sense of under confidence. According to Grites (2013), transfer students exhibit a certain level of under confidence which leads to isolation and lack of involvement with other students, student groups, or campus activities. Isolation is intensified as transfer students do not identify themselves as transfer students, thus, they are unable to connect to other transfer students sharing similar experiences (Grites, 2013). Moreover, their anxiety is related to whether they would be successful at a 4-year institution. This is contributed to the level of academic preparation and the uncertainty associated with the rigor of classes in the state university. Transfer students also feel anxious adjusting and coping with a new academic institution with different policies and procedures, bigger campus, larger classrooms sizes, and different academic environment (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013; Townsend, B. K. 2008). To summarize, transfer students' anxiety is exasperated by several factors related to transition to a

new institution and starting on a new journey. Nonetheless, this anxiety could also be alleviated by the services that prepare and support these junior transfer students to what is needed before, during, and after the transition (Beiter et al., 2014; Townsend, 2008).

Transfer shock constitutes an additional barrier transfer students must tackle. Transfer shock refers to the decline in students' grades following their transfer to a 4-year state university. The research was consistent in its claim that transfer students are inclined to suffer from transfer shock, therefore, leading to a decrease in their Grade Point Average (GPA) (Rhine et al., 2010; Ishitani, 2008, Cejda, 1997; Laanan, 2002). Transfer shock is associated with a combination of situational, psychological, and academic challenges transfer students face (Laanan, 2002; Thomas et al., 2019). Transfer shock is also linked to inadequate preparation for the class rigor of 4-year state university, bigger class sizes, and limited targeted support. Likewise, it is related to the reluctance of transfer students to get involved with campus life and in student organizations and activities. Two studies examined the transfer shock in the different disciplines to conclude that students who transferred to pursue majors in education, arts and humanities, and social sciences reflected an increase in their GPA compared to transfer students in STEM majors who exhibited a decline in their GPA upon transferring to a 4-year state university (Rhine et al., 2010; Cejda, 1997). Another study that was identified focused on providing opportunities for transfer students to be included in the honors programs through restructuring the GPA requirement for the honors programs to consider transfer shock (Thomas et al., 2019). Despite the different findings, these studies were similar in their focus on the importance of support services and pathway programs to mitigate the decrease in students GPA associated with transfer shock (Rhine et al., 2010; Allen, 2014; Thomas et al., 2019).

Institutional Challenges

In addition, transfer students are confronted with institutional and academic barriers. Among these difficulties is the ability to transfer the credits taken at the state college to the state university. It is estimated that transfer students lost around thirteen credits when transferring to another institution (Simone, 2014). Spencer (2020) echoed the same concern with around 20% of transfer students not able to transfer any credits. He stated that although students who transfer their credits have greater chances of succeeding and completing their bachelor's degree, unfortunately, many students lose eight credits on average upon their transfer. With limited or insufficient prior academic and career advising, in many cases, credits taken at a 2-year state college might not be relevant to the major students are getting into at the 4-year state university (Rhine et al., 2010). To address some of this confusion and streamline the transfer of credits, different states have implemented policies and established agreements between institutions (Rhine et al., 2010; DLSS, n.d.; Spencer, 2019; Giani, 2019). The state common core was implemented in some states where students do not have to take additional general education requirements and courses automatically transfer to the 4-year institution. Other states executed comprehensive state-wide articulation agreements that allow transfer students to easily and successfully transfer the credits earned at state colleges to a 4-year state university. These agreements provide, in some cases, solid guidance for students regarding the appropriate course work selection that ensure the seamless transfer of credits to a 4-year state university. Specifically, the state of Florida has additional policies to ease the transfer of credits that extend to statewide common course numbering with a uniform course number for general education courses in all state colleges and universities as well as a guaranteed transfer of an associate degree to a state university at junior level (Giani, 2019; ECS, 2020). Some of the universities in

Florida have also forged collaborative articulation agreements with several state colleges and implemented a comprehensive advising and support services programs that further optimize the linear progression of student to the state university.

Although the transfer agreements and policies facilitate the transfer of credits to the state university, they do not guarantee admission to the major of choice. Some desired majors in health care, engineering, and business are considered limited access majors and can be competitive to get admitted into. With limited access majors, completing the 60 hours to receive an AA degree guarantees admission into the state university, however, it does not guarantee that transfer students matriculate into the major of choice. Similarly, there could be some prerequisite classes that students failed to take for the desired major although they have the required associate of arts (A.A.) degree to get admitted into the state university (Townsend, 2008). In this case, student must take additional courses to get into their major of choice (Giani, 2019). One study by Musoba et al. (2018) investigates how this exclusion can create an unexpected barrier that deter students who have already invested 2 years of classes from fulfilling their career goals, finding an alternative path, and even graduating timely. Another study by Rhine et al. (2010) suggested that student should use their time at the state college to explore what they can do and test with different courses to clarify their educational and career goals especially if they are indecisive about a major. On the other hand, for many students who are members of minority or underserved communities, taking additional course work might not be a feasible option. According to Giani (2019) and Xu et al. (2018), an intersectionality in interventions between advising models, state policies, and institutional practices should be founded and evaluated to reduce credit loss of transfer students.

Higher Education in Florida

Florida State System

The public higher education system in Florida constitutes of state colleges and state universities. According to Florida Department of Education (2020), the mission of the state colleges is to offer access to affordable high-quality programs that would generate educated and skillful students who can compete globally and meet the demands of the local market diverse needs. The state colleges in Florida are under the jurisdiction of the State Board of Education. “Administratively, the Chancellor of the Florida College System reports to the Commissioner of Education who serves as the chief executive officer of the Department of Education” (Florida Department of Education, 2020). The state colleges in Florida have seventy-two campuses and are attended by 733,000 students. Sixty-five percent of Florida’s high school graduates start their journey of postsecondary education at one of Florida’s 28 state colleges. Eighty-two percent of freshman and sophomore minority students in public higher education attend a Florida State college. (Florida Department of Education, 2020).

The public university system in Florida encompasses twelve universities that the Florida Board of Governors manage, operate, and regulate. The Board constitutes of seventeen members and serves a seven-year term. It is estimated that more than 300,000 students attend the state university system which is considered the second largest in the nation (State University System of Florida, 2020). The Board includes seventeen members, fourteen of whom are appointed by the Florida Governor and confirmed by the Florida Senate for a term of seven years. The chief executive and administrative officer of the university system is the chancellor than is appointed by the board. (Florida Department of Education, 2020).

Articulation Agreements

The state of Florida has a progressive and clearly articulated 2+2 transfer agreements between the twelve state universities, the twenty-eight state colleges, and the Board of Governors. According to Garcia Falconetti (2009), the collaboration at state, local, and institutional level coupled with articulation practices made Florida's 2+2 system effective in promoting access to higher education. Florida has instituted statewide policies and mechanisms to allow for efficient and impactful transfer practices between the 2-year state colleges and 4-year state universities. The 2+2 system allows students who have completed an Associate of Arts in a state college to transfer seamlessly to a state university to complete their bachelor's degree. This agreement guarantees not only admission but also the transfer of general education and pre-major course credits to the state universities. Transfer students start at the state university in their junior year and earn their bachelor's degree within two years, regardless of the program of study or the receiving institution.

Earning an Associate of Arts (A.A.) Degree is the basis for matriculation of transfer students from a state college into a state university. Section 1007.23 of Florida Statutes dictates that every student who graduates with an associate of arts from a Florida state college is guaranteed admission into a state university. This agreement, however, does not guarantee students admission into the state university of their choice. Transfer students are also not guaranteed getting admitted into their preferred program of study. The associate of arts degree is earned after a student completes sixty semester hours of college credit courses in an established program of study with grade point average of at least 2.0 in all courses, fulfils the requirements for English and mathematics courses, and establishes proficiency of college-level competencies in communication and computation via the College Level Academic Skills Test or its equivalent.

Earning an Associate of Science (A.S.) Degree also constitutes grounds for transfer following similar conditions. (Garcia Falconetti, 2009; State University Systems of Florida, 2020; Lipscomb et al., 2019).

In addition to the statewide 2+2 articulation agreements, some state universities developed robust transfer mechanism through collaborative partnerships with some state colleges. A large metropolitan research university in Florida has entered a joint partnership with six state colleges in which it guaranteed admission for their students who have earned an associate degree. Students who are completing their A.A. or articulated A.S. degree from any of the partner state colleges and considering transferring to the state university have access to the university's targeted pre-enrollment coaching and support at their own college campuses. The services include assistance through the transfer process, career researching, major exploration, and resources to help students be successful. The college students are offered continuous communication prior to transferring to the state university and could attend presentations and workshops put forth by the state university. This state university also affirmed shorter completion time, continuous student support, and a smooth transfer process (Host Institution, n.d.).

Performance Based Funding

Florida implements a performance-based funding model in which the allocation of funds for state universities is based on institutional excellence and improvement of performance. This model started in Florida as early as 1994 when the Government Performance and Accountability Act was passed and came into effect in 1996 with the Performance Incentive Funding program. The Performance Incentive Funding program has linked funds to specific performance indicators and molded the performance-based funding that is present today (Dougherty et al., 2011). The

current performance funding model was implemented in 2014 and it identified ten metrics on which state universities are evaluated and incentivized (Cornelius & Cavanaugh, 2016). The first eight metric are common to all institutions, the Board of Governors of the state of Florida chooses the ninth metric, and the board of trustees of the respective state university select the tenth metric (Bombaugh & Miller, 2019). State universities must receive at least fifty-five points on 100 points scale to receive funding, however, in fiscal year 2021-2022, a minimum of 60-points will be needed for institutions to receive institutional investment. The nine metrics included the percent of bachelor's graduates enrolled or employed (\$25,000+) in the U.S. one year after graduation, median wages of bachelor's graduates employed full-time one year after graduation, cost to the student net tuition and fees for resident undergraduates per 120 credit hours, four year FTIC graduation rate, academic progress rate 2nd year retention with GPA at 2.0 or above, bachelor's degrees awarded within programs of strategic emphasis, university access rate percent of undergraduates with a Pell Grant, the graduate degrees awarded within programs of strategic emphasis, and the Board of Governors' choice of the percent of bachelor's degrees without excess hours (State University System of Florida, 2020). The previous performance funding model did not incorporate a benchmark that directly correlated with transfer students' access, retention, and completion. It is only until 2019 that Florida Legislature added a new metric focusing on 2-year graduation rate for Florida College System AA transfers, then later to a 3-year graduation rate for 2022- 2023 academic year. (State University System of Florida, 2023).

The table below summarizes the metrics changes that are usually revised and approved in March of each year by the Florida Board of Governors and become effective in June:

June BOG Meeting		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Allocation Fiscal Year		2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
1	% Enrolled or Employed FT (FL)	•	•	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	% Enrolled or Employed FT (US)	-	-	•	•	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	% Enrolled/Employed (\$25,000+)	-	-	-	-	•	•	•	•	•	-	-
	% Enrolled/Employed (\$30,000+)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	•	-
	% Enrolled/Employed (\$40,000+)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	•
2	Median FT Wage in Florida	•	•	•	•	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Median FT Wage in U.S.	-	-	-	-	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
3	Cost of Bachelor's Degree to the Institution	•	•	•	•	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Cost of Bachelor's Degree to the Student	-	-	-	-	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
4	FTIC Grad Rate (6yr)	-	•	•	•	•	-	-	-	-	-	-
	FTIC Grad Rate (4yr)	-	-	-	-	-	•	•	•	•	•	•
5	Academic Progress Rate	-	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
6	% Bachelor's PSE Degrees	-	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
7	Access Rate	-	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
8	% Graduate PSE Degrees	-	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•	•
9	% Excess Hours	-	-	-	-	-	•	•	•	-	-	-
9a	FCS AA Transfer Grad Rate (2yr)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	•	•	-
	FCS AA Transfer Grad Rate (3yr)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	•
9b	FTIC Pell Grad Rate (6yr)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	•	•	•
# OF CHANGES TO COMMON METRICS		-	5	1	0	3	1	0	0	2	1	2

Notes: **Academic Years (AY)** reference the summer, fall and spring terms. **Fiscal Years (FY)** reference Florida's July 1 to June 30 fiscal year.

PBF#9 was not a universally common metric until the 2018-19 allocation year.

For more information about PBF, see: http://www.flbog.edu/about/budget/performance_funding.php.

Figure 1. Performance Based Funding Metric Changes

Note. Adapted from 2022 Information Brief – PBF Metric Schedule (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.flbog.edu/finance/performance-based-funding/>

Dougherty and Reddy (2014) stated that concerns about enhancing the performance of colleges and universities have led the federal and state policymakers to reform their funding process and change it to a performance-based funding. The performance of higher education institutions is assessed based on outcomes including retention, completion, graduation, and employment rates (Dougherty & Reddy 2014; Horn & Lee, 2017). The allocation of fund and incentivizing institutions depends on the institutions meeting or exceeding the set metrics, thus, linking state funding to institutional outcome (Horn & Lee, 2017; Smithers, 2020). Tudor (2018) stressed that now more than ever higher education institutions are under immense pressure to retain more students partly due to the benchmarking and allocation of state funding for public

higher education institutions. Although the performance funding model in Florida just started recognizing transfer students as a key metric common to all universities, it is without a doubt that colleges have become a crucial pipeline of students for the state university system in Florida through the articulation agreements. Articulation agreements have made it more critical to create policies and practices that would support student retention and completion due to accountability and performance funding. In 2018, transfer students constituted more than half of the juniors at the state universities in Florida (Florida Consortium, 2019). According to the State University System of Florida Data Dashboard (2021), transfer students added to 69,818 students in 2019 and 69,326 in 2020 for all Florida state universities. A large state university in Florida, for example, is the first choice for many transfer students compared to other universities in the United States (Host Institution, n.d.) with almost five thousand students transferring from state colleges in 2010 (HELMS, 2010). Since transfer student success was not directly tied with performance funding, there was limited innovative and strategic measures to further support transfer students. By including transfer student success in the performance metrics, institutions will now be required to identify innovative approaches and adopt comprehensive support programs to better serve the transfer students. Additionally, state universities and policy makers will need to identify potential gaps in the transfer process and implement strategic and robust changes to boost success rates among transfer students, thus meeting the new metric of ensuring the required graduation rate for transfer students.

Although the performance-based funding model is popular for making higher education institutions accountable for their performance, it has several flaws and criticisms. A study by Horn and Lee (2017) reveals that one of the limitations is related to the accuracy of the metrics in determining which institutions are deemed more effective when evaluating graduation rates.

They argue that some institutions are at advantage as they can attract and recruit a better caliber of students than others. The implementation of such a metric coupled with the concern of losing resources, may force institutions who serve a diverse body of students from underserved communities to redirect their efforts on recruiting students with better test scores and from better performing schools. Another study by Cornelius and Cavanaugh (2016) argue that institutions have different missions and program offerings; therefore, to apply one set on standards to all might be impractical and problematic. According to Cornelius and Cavanaugh (2016), the metrics pertaining to the percent of bachelor's graduates employed and the median wages of bachelor's graduates employed full-time one year after graduation do not allow for many external factors like economic changes and the geographic location. For example, in-state employment can be higher in regional campuses than central campuses whose graduates are more likely to find opportunities out of state and be paid higher. By not considering out of state employment, the data will be skewed. Similarly, the metric focusing on bachelor's degrees awarded in areas of strategic emphasis might render the institutions who rely on their programs offering on liberal arts and humanities at a disadvantage. Both studies suggest that because of the fear of losing funding, higher education institutions will be forced to focus more on changing their policies to admit more qualified students instead of establishing strategies and program to improve student outcomes (Horn & Lee, 2017; Cornelius & Cavanaugh, 2016).

Coaching in Academic Setting

Despite the clearly articulated and standardized transfer policies and programs in Florida, the road to degree attainment at a state university could be challenging and uncertain. Transfer students face several barriers that hinder them from completing their course work in higher

education. As stated by Fowler and Boylan (2010), the challenges could be academic but also non-academic and personal relating to goal attainment and college preparedness.

According to Strange (2015), it is crucial to explore the reasons behind students' success and to identify ways for institutions to support this success. Student completion and success is crucial to the current job market where better job opportunities are based on education and knowledge and job security and advancement opportunities require a postsecondary education (Bailey, Jacobs, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2003).

While common interventions including academic advising, tutoring, and counseling have been instrumental to support student retention and success, they are still inadequate (Alzen et al., 2021). The obstacles transfer student encounter would be overcome with the help of an advising model that does not only focus on providing academic support but also on addressing factors relating to students' attitude, motivation, time management, and other personal factors. Based on these conditions, new methods relating to support services must be implemented by higher education institutions to ensure students' adjustment, resilience, retention, and success. Such models favor the role of student support services in facilitating the social development and academic attainment, which in turn affects student retention (Mayhew et al., 2016). Tinto and Pusser (2006) identified the elements that would constitute such a model as they correlated students' success with an institutional setting that is "committed to their success, hold high expectations for their success, provide needed academic and social support, provide frequent feedback, and actively involve them, especially with other students and faculty, in learning." (p.8). Bearing in mind this research background, a new model of advising known as coaching is introduced that caters to the students' needs and helps them overcome challenges, achieve goals, and be successful.

Although it has not been subject to much empirical research, academic coaching is a new, innovative, and emerging concept that higher education institutions have been adopting to address the holistic needs of the students with an objective of increasing student retention and graduation rates (Capstick et al., 2019; Robinson, 2015; Alzen et al., 2021). Although there is not one specific definition, coaching is defined by The International Coaching Federation (2012) as “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.” (para. 9). Another definition by Pechac and Slantcheva-Durst (2019) described coaching as an intervention strategy, that “has borrowed from many traditional student support services including mentoring, tutoring, advising, and counseling, among others.” (p. 725, para. 2). In their study, Alzen et al. (2021) stated that coaching is a comprehensive approach to advising that supports students in identifying their goals and ways to attain them. Two studies focused on coaching as an individualized and targeted support that supplements other student support services, helps students navigate their way, offers skill development, and serves as link between students and campus resources (Pechac & Slantcheva-Durst, 2019; Rodriguez Ott et al., 2019). Finally, coaching is also regarded as an intervention that contributes to the students’ sense of acceptance and belonging to the campus which culminates in a higher self-efficacy and better performance (Vanacore & Dahan, 2019).

Several studies were consistent in their claim that coaches play a key role in supporting students although they vary in describing the role of the coaches in a higher education setting. While some studies regarded a coach as a someone who renders non-academic support for the purpose of developing needed skills to succeed (Rodriguez Ott et al., 2019), others viewed them as an expert and a role model who drives students to establish meaningful connections on

campus and empowers them to reach their goals (Pechac & Slantcheva-Durst, 2019; Alzen et al., 2021). One study viewed the role of the coach as working with student, specifically at-risk students, to explore barriers that impede students' success. They then focus on establishing effective strategies, including life and study skills, to help students overcome these barriers and be successful in their studies (Capstick et al., 2019). Similarly, success coaches are in place who can guide students towards achieving learning outcome through integrated advising that incorporates academic, personal, and career support (Neuhauser & Weber 2011).

After assessing the coaching services provided to 264 first year and transfer students at the Our Lady of the Lake University through a \$1 million grant, Farrell (2007) defined success coaches as members who support, guide, and encourage students beyond just teaching the basic study skills or time management. The coaches assist students with personal issues and life affairs that could be impeding their success. According to Farrell (2007), they could aid them in navigating the welfare system for sick relatives, student aid, or other financial matters.

Finally, Allen and Lester (2012, p.10) defined the role of success coach as someone who “encourages students to be self-motivated, responsible and self-managed.” They added that the coach has various tasks; one of these is to build bridges between the student and the institution. Other responsibilities encompass ensuring the students maintain academic progress, creating collaborative relationships between the students and faculty, generating a sense of responsibility within the student, instituting individual goals for the students, providing skills training, and dealing with any issues of concerns relevant to the students.

In reviewing the research on the effectiveness of coaching in academic settings, there was an overwhelming agreement that coaching demonstrated robust results on students' academic performance. In their study, Vanacore and Dahan (2019) found that coaching was effective in

helping students who are on academic probation. Those are students who fail to maintain the required GPA set by their institution for a variety of reasons including the rigor of classes and transfer shock. Students who are not able to earn the requisite GPA could get dismissed from their program of study or the institution. The study rendered robust results on students' academic performance. Through continuous follow up, coaches assisted students on academic probation in developing needed academic skills for them to become confident in their success. Moreover, the results of another study concluded that students who have received intensive short-term coaching earned a higher GPA than other students. Coaches had continuous face to face and virtual engagement with the students, focusing on academic and nonacademic intervention, resulting in a higher rate of credit accumulation needed for students to successfully complete their program of study (Rodriguez Ott et al., 2019). In their study, Bettinger and Baker (2011) provided evidence to support the value of student coaching. The student success coach establishes a connection with the students from the freshman year and stays in contact with the students to provide support with a range of personal and academic issues including goal setting, problem solving, time management, and study skills. The result of their study affirms that students with such a support have better probability of graduating and completing their program of study. The role of coaches is not only paramount for student success, but also financially more efficient than other interventions that have been utilized (Bettinger & Baker 2011). Coaching has been also effective in supporting at risk students. Several studies provide compelling evidence that first year and continuing students with lower GPA who participated with coaching program showed an increase in their GPA and more likely to be retained for following semesters than students who did not. (Capstick et al., 2019; Capstick et al., 2019; (Pechac & Slantcheva-Durst, 2019).

Advising Services and Programs

Many research studies focus on the importance of the relationship between students' success and a supportive higher education institution environment. Robinson (2015, p. 47) stated that "representatives of the college" are considered the utmost predictor "of whether or not a student persists or departs an institution". It is important to note that "new transfer students are also first-year students at their new institutions and should be welcomed with no less attention than traditional first-year students" as the challenges they face are similar (Grites, 2013). These challenges include adjusting to new a big campus versus the smaller state college campus, getting familiar to new policies and procedures, understanding academic standards and faculty expectations, choosing courses, and learning the culture of the university that provides a less personalized experience (Grites, 2013). Since transfer students and traditional first year students face similar challenges at a state university, literature pertaining to traditional first year students applies to first year transfer students. As such, academic advising serves as an effective tool that shapes students' experience and their ability to overcome challenges. The advising strategies and relationship building are effective methods for navigating successfully the first year at a 4-year institution.

Effective academic advising can remove barriers that impede retention; a correlation that has been studied extensively in recent years. Tinto and Pusser (2006, p.8) identified the elements of a theoretical effective advising model in an institutional setting asserting that students are more likely to be successful in settings that are "committed to their success, hold high expectations for their success, provide needed academic and social support, provide frequent feedback, and actively involve them, especially with other students and faculty." Advising and advising programs with their varied and distinctive features provide the supportive context that

influence students' success. A qualitative study by Turner and Thompson (2014) was conducted examining the perceptions of students who dropped out to better understand the challenges that could affect their retention. The results of the study suggest that a crucial feature impacting the students' retention is the quality of the academic services they have received. The student reported poor service and limited interaction with the advisor which is not enough to support the academic and personal challenges they face when they transition to higher education (Turner & Thompson, 2014). Academic advising constitutes a vital foundation to first-year student's development and the same applies for transfer students in their first year at a state university. In his study, Tinto (1991) stressed that providing effective and "readily available" advising and support to students increase perseverance which in turn leads to more retention. The same level of effective and "readily available" support can positively impact the experiences of transfer students in their first year at the state university because they are venturing into a new learning environment.

Additionally, a study conducted by Montag et al. (2012) indicates that students who declare their major in the first year have shown to have more persistence and commitment to complete their program against potential obstacles. Although transfer students usually have a predetermined major selected prior to starting at the state university, advisors can assist in improving satisfaction and retention by offering a myriad of services to make transfer students better commit to majors. When advising is personalized and when advisors are knowledgeable of major requirements and course offering, they can connect transfer students with courses most relevant to their major and assist in strengthening further commitment to the major. Furthermore, interactions with advisors constitute a major aspect of the social context that draws students toward certain majors (Montag et al., 2012). The social relationships are an important piece of

the students' academic experience, in fact, many students report frustration with the experience they have with their academic advisors (Junco et al., 2016) because this interaction with the advisors was not present or ineffective. Therefore, effective advising influences positively the commitment to a major of study which in turn will keep students focused and reduce completion time and accumulating excess credits through enrolling in classes they do not need.

Theories of Student Development

Nancy Schlossberg's Transition Theory (1984) is used as a theoretical framework for this study. The theory is centered on the experience of individuals through the process of transition. This transition could be personal, professional, or academic (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Schlossberg's transition theory also focuses on the varied factors and support levels related to transitions that can affect how people go through and cope with the transition.

To gain a better understanding of the meaning of a specific transition as experienced by an individual, three major components must be considered: the context, type, and impact of the transition. The context refers to the relationship of the individual with the transition and the setting where the transition occurs which in turn determines our reaction to the transition. The setting goes beyond the geographical location to include socioeconomic and gender among other arenas. These different contexts could affect the individual directly or indirectly, influence their perception of the transition, and alter the way they elicit resources. (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012)

Impact is the "degree to which a transition alters one's daily life" (Evans et al., 2010, p. 215). According to Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012), the more impact the transition

has on the individual, the more resources and time need to be allocated to support individuals in coping and addressing the impacts of transitions.

Schlossberg believes that transition is a process that takes time depending on the individual and the resources available to move through and manage the transition. Goodman et al. (2006) adopt the early work of Schlossberg (1989) by identifying three stages of the transition process: “moving in”, “moving through”, and “moving out.” Although transition could lead to growth and development, in some cases, it could be stressful and thus impedes success. In application, transitioning from college to a university could be overwhelming to transfer students and potentially leads to students dropping out or underperforming in their first year. The support services provided by the state university aim to abet the transfer student in the initial stages of the transition through the success coaches who target students at the state colleges even before they transfer to the state university. The support continues with other services during the student’s phase of the integration of the transition in their first year at the state university.

In her model, Schlossberg identified four factors that alters the individual’s ability to adjust to the transition. This is known as the 4S’s which stands for situation, self, support, and strategies.

Situation: The researcher will take into consideration the timing of the transition from a state college to a state university and how transfer students view it. Other factors that could affect the adjustment of the students to the change could be related to what the students perceive as the change or aspects of the change they have some control on. Other situational factors that also affect transition include students’ similar experiences, coping skills, the duration, and other concurrent stressors that students could be going through at the time they start at a state college.

Self: The concept of the self is of important relation to this research as the personal and demographic characteristics as well as the psychological resources will have a huge influence on the transfer students' reaction to the transition, utilization of the support services, and coping strategies.

Support: Support refers to the social network of family and friends which is especially important when starting a new stage in anyone's life, like starting a bachelor's degree at a state university. More importantly, it also refers to the institutional support like coaching and advising whose primary function is to provide feedback and guidance.

Strategies: Strategies, which is the last stage in Schlossberg's model, is particularly relevant to this study. To cope with the transition and face potential challenges, students choose to engage in information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior. Coaches and advisors assist students by reaching out to them, making information available for them, encouraging goal setting and taking action, helping break barriers that impedes action, and providing guidance and different perspectives that would guide students into alternative ways of thinking enabling them to resolve issues and overcome challenges.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory has been used extensively in literature as a framework to conceptualize how individuals go through transition (Karmelita, 2018). In her study, Karmelita (2018) explored the barriers adult learner face when they attend college. Schlossberg was used to highlight the conditions surrounding the adult learner and how those conditions influence an individual's ability to cope with change. It stresses the importance of family support, involvement opportunities on campus, and the transition program offered by the college in helping adult learners through the transition and strengthen their confidence in returning to and succeeding in college.

Additionally, the Schlossberg's transition theory is also applied in assessing the individuality of each student in experiencing transitions, particularly first-generation and minority college students. In their study, Tovar and Simon (2006), examined how these students experience transition differently and therefore require varied resources that address their transition needs and help them develop unique coping strategies. Minority and first generations students are faced with great challenges including less academic preparedness, family responsibilities, and financial hardship. The transition results in having the students trying to find a balance between their academics and their family commitments, between their aspirations and their environment that might not understand the value of education. Such a transition shapes and changes their roles and relationships with those around them.

Furthermore, examining troops and veterans' transitions into higher education is also seen through the lenses of Schlossberg's theory. It is used to provide valuable insights into veterans' transition from being in the military to becoming students while examining the institutional policies and practices that could aid or impede the transition. The theory provides understanding of the factors influencing the veteran through Schlossberg's phases of transition: moving into, progressing through, and moving out of campus life. Grounding studies related to veteran's transition to higher education in the transitional framework of adult development, will allow for a comprehensive examination of the challenges that veteran-students face. Challenges vary from disabilities to adapting to a new and different environment with a distinct set of rules during the moving in phase of the theory. Then, veteran students start adjusting to the academic setting and learn to balance academic expectations and other priorities while utilizing personal, family, and institutional resources. Eventually, with adequate support, they move through the transition to start thinking about the next stage of their academics and careers. Understanding the

challenges and veterans' perspectives within the transition process outlined by Schlossberg will allow institutions to develop and create practices and programs that better serve this population. (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Gordon, et al., 2015).

Several studies focused on the transitions of international students into the U.S. Higher education system. International students face several barriers including homesickness, limited English proficiency, loneliness, anxiety, and stress. (Kwon, 2009). Although some of the changes are expected, many situations are only experienced by the students when they are in the new environment. Schlossberg framework is utilized to explore how international students experience transition and use available resources related to the four factors, 4S's, to adopt coping strategies and respond to these new conditions.

This study also draws on Sanford's Theory of Challenge and Support that is precisely related to student support and development. Nevitt Sanford's Theory of Challenge and Support identifies the relationship between student development and environment interaction. He believes that student development is a process that leads to a significant growth where students become more capable of functioning in varied situations. Sanford theorizes that the environment of the academic institution the student is in plays a crucial role in the student's development. According to Sanford, individuals must have a certain level of readiness related to internal processes or environmental factors to exhibit certain behaviors. This readiness should be coupled with the right amount of challenge and an equivalent level of support (Evans et al., 2010). Starting at a state university can pose several challenges for transfer students or add to their existing ones, therefore, making sure enough support is provided through success coaches and advising services is crucial. Students presented with too many challenges without adequate institutional support would lead to poor academic performance, as well as low retention and

completion rate. Similarly, students receiving too much support without any challenge will hardly learn and develop. Therefore, for individual to show growth and avoid frustration and burnout, an equivalent amount of challenge and support is needed.

Summary

This chapter provided a review of the relevant scholarship and analyzed how support services is crucial for transfer student to alleviate potential challenges. The chapter begins with a thorough discussion of the different challenges transfer students face to then discuss Florida state university system and how student transfer from state colleges to state universities has been an integral part of this system. Next, the chapter presented a review of the literature related to student retention and support services particularly success coaching and advising. Finally, the chapter closes with the major theoretical foundations related directly to this study on transfer students and student development. The next chapter will discuss the study design and research methodology.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Introduction

This chapter describes the study design and research methodology used to gain a better understanding of the experiences and perceptions of transfer students with transfer support services before and during their first year at a state university. It demonstrates the different steps that will be conducted to address the research questions. Additionally, this study will employ qualitative research method and incorporate a phenomenological research design in the form of interviews to gain an in-depth insight of the experiences as explained and portrayed by the participants. The phenomenological research will be chosen to reach a profound understanding of the collective experience by the participants in relation to a certain phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Electing phenomenological design is prompted by the research questions. Three main research questions are developed for this study:

1. What are the transfer students' perceptions of the transfer and advising services they have received before and during their first year at a large metropolitan research university in Florida?
2. What strategies transfer students utilized to overcome their challenges?

This chapter is arranged in four sections. The first section discusses the participants selection and recruitment including the research site. The second section addresses the research instrument that will be utilized in this study and how the study will be conducted. Additionally, this chapter addresses the process that will be used for data collection and management. Finally, it describes the analysis of the data and the validity and the trustworthiness of the study.

Methodology and Approach

This study is influenced by the Constructivist perspective in the belief that “individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.13). These multiple views that are presented by the participants regarding a specific experience are often different and unique as they have been developed through different interactions. This study will be grounded on exploring these views on the phenomena being studied.

Since qualitative research is exploratory and descriptive in nature, it provides a viable approach to examine human experiences as discerned and reflected by the individuals in their own different contexts. The qualitative approach aims to describe individual meanings of the events for the people involved (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012). In this study, qualitative approach will be sought to examine, in depth, the experiences of the transfer students and create meaning through the views they presented.

This qualitative study will utilize random purposive sampling of the participants. The researcher will start with purposeful sampling which is one of the most common methods used for qualitative research. According to Marshall (1996), the most appropriate sample that could answer the research question is actively elected and chosen by using purposeful sampling. Creswell and Creswell (2018, p.185) favor purposeful sampling for qualitative research as it is essential to choose the sample that is best informed of the issue being investigated and that would promote the “understanding of the problem and the research.” After that, the researcher will use random purposive sampling by randomly selecting the sample out of the ones that were chosen via purposeful sampling. Lunenburg and Irby (2016) state that random purposive sampling is randomly selecting the participants from those who were purposely selected because they are too many to include in the study.

Research Setting

The participants will be selected from a large metropolitan research university to understand their experiences with the transfer services they have received. The institution serves more than 70,000 students and is known to attract more transfer students than other state universities in the same state. This single higher education institution will be purposely selected since it is pioneering the use of transfer services for students through comprehensive services it provides. The university success coaches proactively meet the students where they are by being physically present at the college campuses to reach out and target the students even before they transfer to the university. The single site was also selected to ensure that students have received common and similar services. The institution has multiple campuses throughout the state with collaborative student transfer partnerships and agreements with various state colleges.

Participants

In this study the participants will be selected using criterion sampling. According to Lunenburg and Irby (2016), the selected participants must all meet specific criterion. The transfer students will all be chosen from the main campus of the state university. The participants will be in their first year of study at the state university. Additionally, the transfer students selected must have earned an associate in arts degree at a state college, successfully completed sixty semester hours of college credit courses, had a GPA of 2.0 and above, and transferred to a state university through an articulation agreement between the state university and the state college. The transfer students who utilized the transfer services before and after transferring to the state university will be the subject of the study.

Since the sample size in qualitative study tends to be small and purposeful (Lunenburg & Irby, 2016), the sample will be comprised of eleven participants to avoid saturation. Saturation is when a researcher decides the available data is sufficient or superfluous and any new data will no longer bring new insights or added information (Charmaz's, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Instrumentation

To best accomplish the task of exploring and describing the meanings constructed by the participants, qualitative research using interviews will be used for participants to share their experiences. The rich accounts provided by the transfer students through the interview process will serve to enhance our comprehension of their experiences with a certain phenomenon, the transfer services.

The zoom video interviews utilized semi- structured, pre-determined, and open-ended questions to get in-depth insights into the experiences of transfer students with the transfer services. Creswell and Creswell (2018) believed that the interview is an effective tool when it is not possible or feasible to observe the participants. It is also practical because it can be conducted via an email platform, phone, or a face-to-face interaction. Interviews allow the researcher to elicit the perceptions and the descriptions of the specific experience of the individuals (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). In this study, the perspectives and viewpoints of the transfer students will be gathered through zoom interviews to get a rich understanding of their experiences with transfer services. Please check Appendix A for interview questions.

The researcher will conduct the interviews from a quiet and private room in her house to ensure confidentiality and privacy. The researcher will also ask the participant to access the

zoom meeting from a private room or location so the interview can be conducted quietly and without interruptions. The meetings will be scheduled at a time that fits with the students' schedules and availability. The interview will commence with the researcher introducing herself and the purpose of this study thanking the student for agreeing to meet with her and answer her interview questions. The students will be briefed on the purpose of research being conducted and their consent to proceed will be received before the researcher starts the interview.

Data Collection

In planning this study, the researcher will conform to ethical practices. The approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) will be sought before contacting any of the participants. The participants will be randomly selected by the researcher from the criterion sample that was purposely chosen and recruited through the Connect Office at the target institution. The Connect Office is the office that provides coaching and support services to the transfer students. The Connect Office will facilitate identifying and contacting the students via email explaining the purpose of the study. The researcher will follow up with potential participants individually via email to inform them of the purpose of the study, procedure of the research, potential risks, steps to minimize risks, and measures to maintain the participants' confidentiality. The voluntary written informed consent of the participants will be obtained for those who agree to take part in the study. Additionally, the researcher will ensure the participants that they have the freedom to decline to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. The initial email will be sent to the students on Monday. Please check Appendix B for a copy of the first email. A reminder email will be sent on each Monday for two weeks until the participants are selected. Please check Appendix C for a copy of the reminder email.

The data will be managed following the Halcomb and Davidson (2006) six steps guideline as summarized in Table 2. The first step will be audiotaping of interview and concurrently taking notes. The zoom interviews will be video recorded, and researcher will use a notebook to concurrently take field notes during the interview. It will be important to record nonverbal cues and the researcher's observation as this will aid the researcher in maintaining the flow of the conversation, eliciting follow up questions, creating the descriptive data, and making inferences. The second step will be reflective journalizing immediately after every interview, when possible, by reviewing and elaborating on the notes and initial reactions. The third step will be watching the interview recordings and comparing it to the notes for revision then making any required changes. The purpose of this stage is to ensure the accuracy of the researcher's reflections of what will be communicated during the interview. The fourth step is called preliminary content analysis to elicit common themes between interactions. This will be done manually after the interviews are transcribed using zoom transcription feature. The video recording, transcriptions, and typed up field notes for each interview will be saved in password protected files on the researcher's computer after the participants names are replaced by pseudonyms to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality. After that, a secondary content analysis will be utilized where a second researcher provides a thorough review of both the recordings and field notes to prevent any bias by the researcher and validate the development of themes from the data. Finally, the last step will be thematic review in which the researcher generates common recurring themes.

Table 1

Halcomb and Davidson Guideline, 2006

Six Steps	Description
Audiotaping & Taking Notes	Researcher records nonverbal cues/observations
Reflective Journalizing	After interviews, researcher reviews and expounds on notes
Listening to the Audiotape	Compare audiotape to the notes
Preliminary Content Analysis	Elicit common themes
Secondary Content Analysis	Second researcher reviews audiotapes and field notes
Thematic Review	Generates recurring themes

Data Analysis

The data analysis will be conducted following a specific protocol. The researcher will create and deliver themes from the data that will be collected through an inductive process. The data will be organized and prepared for analysis by transcribing the interviews and typing up the field notes. The data analysis will continue following Creswell's recommendations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018):

1. Reading the data
2. Coding the data
3. Generating descriptions and themes
4. Representing the description and themes

Step one: Reading through the data. The researcher will visually scan and examine all the data by reading it carefully multiple times. Then, she will reflect on the overall meaning of the data and identify the significant statements that best reflect the experiences of the transfer

students with the transfer support services they have received. The researcher afterward will jot down the general thoughts about the data on the margins of the transcript.

Step two: Coding the data. Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 193) define coding as “the process of organizing data by bracketing chunks.” The purpose of the study and the research questions will guide the researcher through the coding process. The researcher will start coding the data by dividing it into categories and labeling it with a descriptive word that would portray the concept or idea which in turn will support the emergence of the themes. This will be done by copying these statements into a separate electronic table with three vertical columns. The statements will be pasted in the first column, the code typed across in the second column, and the page and line number identifying where the statements came from in the original transcript will be placed in the third column. The researcher will be openminded if new unexpected codes emerge.

Step three: Generating descriptions and themes. After the coding is done, the researcher will identify and narrow down the overlapping descriptions among the codes that are deemed to be major findings for the study. The themes that are generated will be reflective of the perspectives represented by most participants as supported by evidence and direct quotes from the interviews. Additionally, the researcher will re-examine the themes to see if few of these themes can be consolidated to avoid the redundancy of the themes. This phase will also serve to alert the researcher of the possibility of any new theme(s) that would emerge.

Step four: Representing the description and themes. The researcher will develop the themes that are represented in the findings section of the study. Additionally, the researcher will consider the format in which the findings of the analysis are presented in the study.

Researcher's Trustworthiness

The researcher will take few steps to safeguard the trustworthiness of the data and the quality of the research. The researcher will conduct member checking throughout the research process. She will verify the emerging findings with participants during the data collection and analysis processes. After the end of each interview, the researcher will summarize the main ideas for the participants and ask if the summary is accurate. After the interview is transcribed, and within few days, the researcher will provide each participant, via email, with a copy of their transcript to check for accuracy and provide feedback and/or additional insights. The researcher additionally will share the major findings, or the themes generated, with the participants to verify if they are accurate. The participants will be given the opportunity to further elaborate and comment on the findings.

Additionally, the researcher will elicit peer debriefing to check the emerging finding and ensure researcher's bias has been mitigated. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), "A peer review or debriefing is the review of the data and research process by someone who is familiar with the research, or the phenomenon being explored." The peer reviewer is a knowledgeable resource who has no connection with the study and can provide an objective perspective. They will ask questions and immerse in thorough discussions with the researcher to ensure that the credibility of the work is not tinted by the researcher's biases or personal values. They will also examine the researcher's data analysis process to verify that themes within the data are relevant to the data set and that the findings are valid. The peer debriefing process will contribute to strengthening the vigor and trustworthiness of the research study as whole.

Summary

In this chapter, the purpose of the study and the two research questions were reiterated. The participants will be chosen using purposeful random sampling from a sample of transfer students in their first year at a state university who have taken advantage of the transfer support services available and provided by the state university. In addition, the chapter identified the instrument to be used for the study as being semi- structured, in-depth interviews to gain valuable insights about the transfer students experiences with transfer support services. Finally, details regarding the data collection and data analysis protocol were stated. The following chapter will demonstrate the findings and results of the data analysis.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

This qualitative study intended to explore the perspectives of transfer students with the transfer and advising services they have received to gain a better understanding regarding the challenges they faced and determine whether these services were effective in helping these students overcome their challenges. The purpose of this study was achieved by conducting semi-structured interviews with 11 transfer students in their first year at the state university to elicit an in-depth depiction of their experiences.

This study intended to answer 2 main research questions. To recapitulate, the following research questions guided this study:

1- What are the transfer students' perceptions of the transfer and advising services they have received before and during their first year at a large metropolitan research university in Florida?

2- What strategies transfer students utilized to overcome their challenges?

This chapter opens with the summary of the demographic variables of the participants including age, program of study, and gender. Next, it portrays the participant's profile: Jake, Joe, Sofia, Brandon, Rita, Gloria, Josh, Pamela, Mira, Venice, and Diana. Their stories will account for their personal and family background as well as their academic journey. The last part of this chapter provides a presentation of the findings arranged by the 2 research questions and summarizes the themes generated using excerpts from the interviews.

Descriptive Statistics

Demographic Variables

In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with eleven transfer students during Fall 2022 to explore how students perceive transfer and advising services in supporting them before and during their first year at the state university. All the participants of this study have transferred to the state university after earning an A.A. or articulated A.S. from one of the partner state colleges. These eleven students transferred to the state university from several state college via an articulation agreement that is established by the state university with the respective state colleges to complement the already constituted statewide articulation agreements and to ensure a seamless transition process.

There were several distinctive variables in the sample of transfer students interviewed for this study. Of the 11 transfer students interviewed, three were nontraditional students in their 30s who have returned after several years to earn their bachelor's degree. All three students had additional responsibilities and unique challenges including being full time students while maintaining a full-time employment and family obligations, being married or single parents. Additionally, 10 of the 11 students received some type of financial assistance; one participant received GI Bill benefits to attend university, one was a self-pay, while the other nine students received the need-based federal Pell Grant financial aid. In this study, females accounted for seven (64%) of the participants while four (36%) participants identified as male (Figure 2 & 3). Generally, the ages of the participants ranged from early twenties to late thirties with the average age being 25 (Figure 4 & 5).

Table 2

Demographic Summary of Participants

Participant's Pseudonyms	Academic Major	Age	Cohort	Tuition Payment	Gender
Jake	Computer Science	37	Fall 2021	Financial Aid	Male
Joe	Psychology	21	Fall 2021	Scholarships	Male
Sofia	Health Sciences	22	Spring 2022	Pell Grant	Female
Brandon	Finance	20	Fall 2021	Scholarships	Male
Rita	Health Science	38	Fall 2021	Self-pay	Female
Gloria	Kinesiology	22	Spring 2022	Financial Aid	Female
Josh	Integrated Business	21	Fall 2021	FL Prepaid & Financial Aid	Male
Pamela	Elementary Education	22	Fall 2021	Pell Grant	Female
Mira	Kinesiology	35	Fall 2021	GI Bill & Grant	Female
Venice	Creative Writing	22	Spring 2022	Pell Grant	Female
Diana	Anthropology	22	Spring 2022	Pell Grant	Female

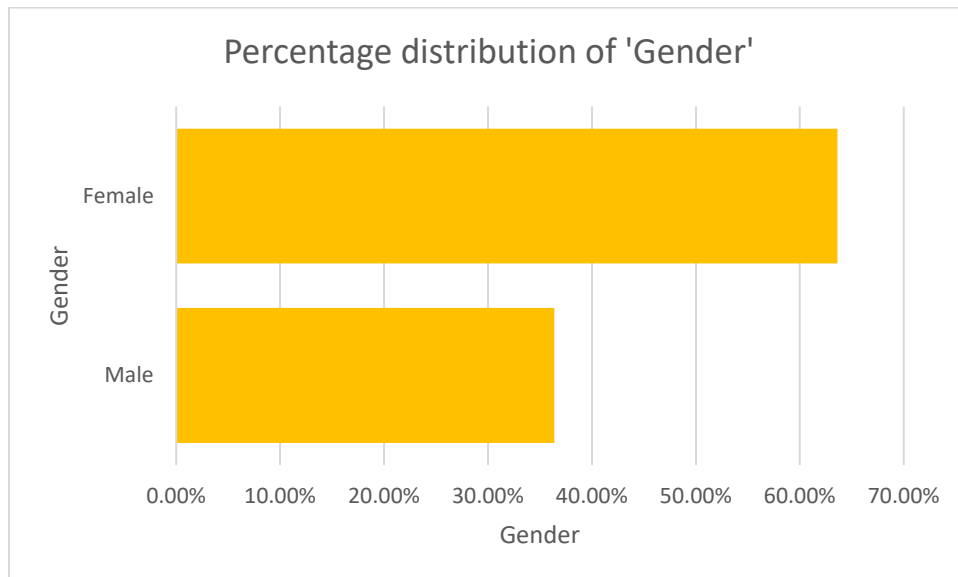


Figure 2. Participants Gender Distribution

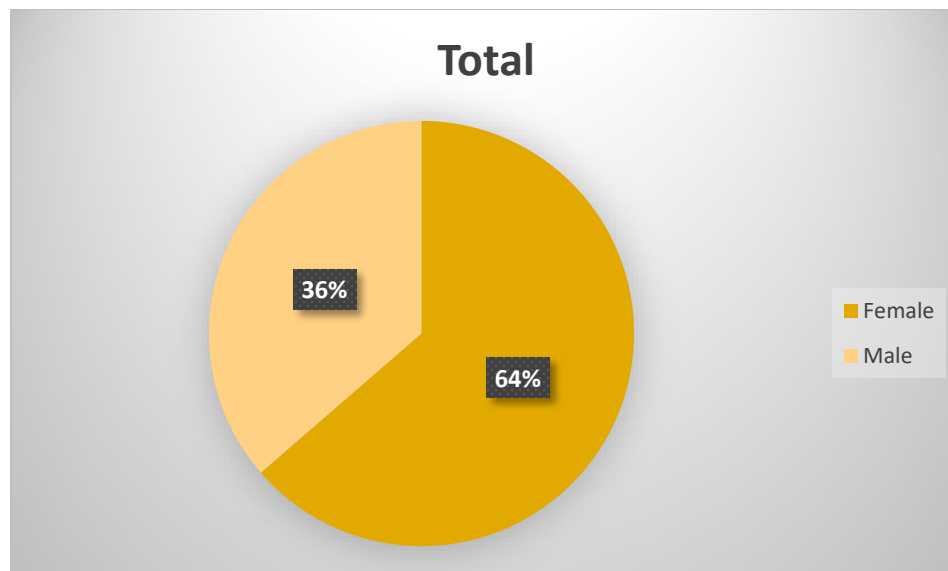


Figure 3. Percentage Distribution of Gender

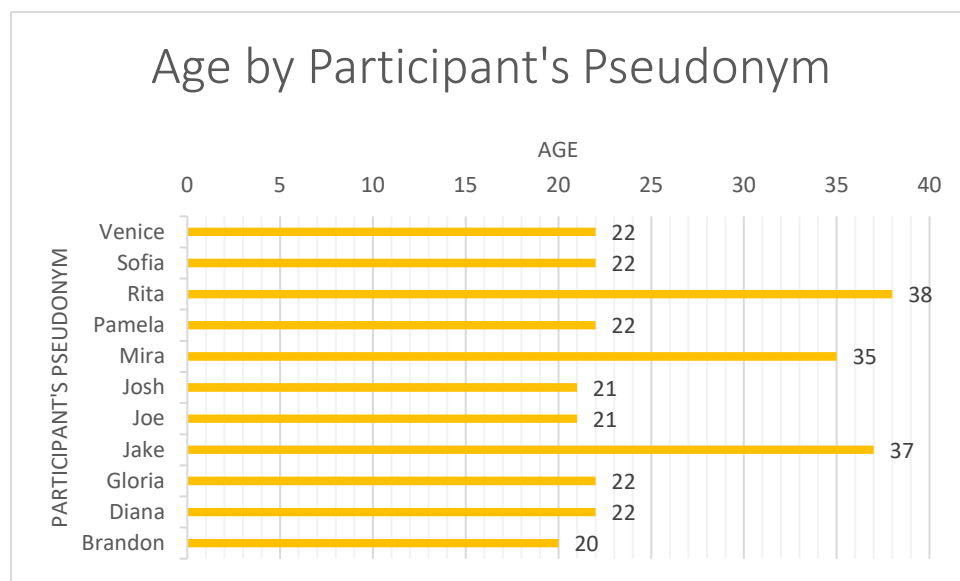


Figure 4. Participant's Age Distribution

Table 3

Average Age by Participant's Pseudonym

Participant's Pseudonym	Average of Age	
Rita	38	
Jake	37	
Mira	35	
Diana	22	
Pamela	22	
Sofia	22	
Gloria	22	
Venice	22	
Joe	21	
Josh	21	
Brandon	20	
Grand Total	25.63636364	

Participants' Profiles

Participant 1 Jake: Jake was a 37-year-old non-traditional student. He has accrued excess credit hours of one hundred and forty from the state college which he attended right out of high school for over a period of five years. During that time, he was also working while his parents were paying for school. He had no educational goals established to give him direction and thus was not taking his education seriously. During college, he would engage fully and pass the course if he liked the professor, however, he would fail the course if he was not intrigued by the subject matter. After working two jobs, getting married, and his wife getting her doctorate degree, he decided to go back to school with his wife's persuasion. He first applied to the state university, without going through the transfer system, but was not offered admission. Therefore, he went back to the state college where he completed two additional courses, earned his AA, and transferred to the state university for his bachelor's degree. His plan was to major in biochemical

science, but he could not proceed due to his work commitment which required him to travel and not be able to attend in person classes. He ended up changing his major and, at the time of the interview, was pursuing a degree in computer science where most of the classes were offered online.

Participant 2- Joe: Joe was 21 years old. He started at a state college before he transferred through the direct articulation agreement to the state university. He was majoring in psychology with the goal of getting into the medical field, specifically psychiatry. He chose this career path because he has come to an understanding of what a serious issue mental health is for a lot of people. He believed that it took a lot of courage for individuals to be honest with themselves and seek help. He wanted to make an impact regarding mental health, including to offer treatment the best way that he could, conduct research to advance treatment methods, and help individuals eliminate obstacles that prevented them from performing everyday activities, such as going to school, taking exams, and finding employment.

Participant 3- Sofia: Sofia was 22 years old and from Venezuela. She moved to the United States when she was 8 months old. She attended a nearby high school that had a very close partnership with a state college since they were right next to each other. This was how Sofia learned about the state college. After graduating from high school, she did not know what she wanted to do, she also thought she could not afford to go to college because she did not have the financial means. Additionally, she had limited knowledge about scholarships and financial aid, so she made the safe bet of attending the nearby state college and doing her AA degree. Sofia had a passion for medicine and was intrigued by helping and advocating for other people. She was at the time of the interview majoring in health sciences and hoping to have a career as a physician assistant.

Participants 4- Brandon: Brandon was 20 years old and majoring in finance. After taking an economics class in high school, he immediately knew he was leaning more towards business majors. Not only he enjoyed the economics class, but it was an opportunity for him to challenge himself since he did not know much about the topic. Brandon was born and raised in Colombia where he finished high school at age fifteen. He attributes graduating from high school at such a young age to “always being good at school,” skipping a grade or two, and being raised by his grandparents who are professors. He was too young to realize his potential or what he needed to do so he started applying for the universities in Colombia. The only program of study that was available for him at one of the top-ranked university was related to international business because of his test scores. Even though he applied to the program, he ended up moving to the Florida with his dad where he returned to high school as a junior. Having graduated high school already in Colombia, he did not pay a lot of attention to his studies although he wanted to maintain a good GPA to do dual enrollment. In his senior year, he travelled back to Colombia and returned in November to complete half of the academic year. Brandon felt like he has lived a lot of experiences compared to other people despite being still very young.

Participant 5- Rita: Rita was a non-traditional 38-year-old student who was majoring in health sciences. Her goal was to have a career in physical therapy, which has been her goal since she was twelve years old. Rita added that being a physical therapist was all she ever wanted to do; she was “tunnel visioned” on physical therapy. Rita started at the state college right out of high school. After 2 years at the state college, she left only to return more than 12 years later and finish her AA before transferring to the state university through the direct articulation program. She did not look at any other universities as she wanted to remain close to her family and stay settled in her full-time job.

After she learned about the direct articulation program with the state university, she took a tour of the university campus and solidified her plans to transfer and seek a degree that allowed her to eventually get into physical therapy. Rita attributed making it thus far to the advisors at the state college who helped her get adjusted to academic life after such a long time of being away, figure things out, and get on the right path to transfer into the state university. The coaches also played an important role reducing her anxiety, navigating school and work, and easing her mind when it came to what she should expect as a student at the state university.

Participant 6- Gloria- Gloria was 22 years old. She started off at a state college where she attended for 3 years. She switched majors several times which lead to her delay in earning her AA and transferring. She still felt as if she had not made a final decision on what major and career field she wanted to get into, but when we talked, she was committed to a major in kinesiology, studying to become a physical therapist. Gloria has been living in Florida for like eight years, after she moved from up north where her plan was to go to college in New Jersey. She had limited knowledge about the colleges in Florida but with extensive research, seeking information, and the help of people around her, she was prepared to go into college and eventually transfer to the state university. She did not know about the direct articulation program between her college and the state university until her first year in college. She described her transfer process as rough and discouraging, but she got through it. She felt that since she has experienced it, she could share her insights with others who were trying to transfer and let them know the steps they should take. At the time of the interview, she was in her second semester at the state university and trying to keep on progressing toward graduation.

Participant 7- Josh: Josh was 21 years old and finishing up his first year at the state university. He transferred from one of the state colleges after receiving his AA. After finishing

high school, he got admitted to the state university for the spring semester instead of fall. Not wanting to waste a semester he joined the state college which was within proximity from his house to save time and money. He was hoping to take a few classes and have those classes transferred over when he started at the state university in the spring, but he ended up staying and completing his AA. Josh started as a business administration major, switched to management, but currently in the integrated business program. Josh was born and raised in Florida and was passionate about sports and outdoor activities.

Participant 8- Pamela: Pamela was an elementary education major in her 3rd semester at the state university. She was passionate about learning and becoming a teacher, something that has always been a dream of hers. Although she got admitted into the state university for the fall semester after high school, she could not join and had to take a semester off for medical reasons. She joined the state college for the spring semester which was a good choice at the time because of cheaper tuition, smaller class size, and the difficulty of joining the state university for another semester than the one she was admitted for. Besides her classes, which were mostly asynchronous, she worked part time.

Participant 9- Mira: Mira was a transfer student from the state college in the Kinesiology program studying to become a physical therapist. She was a non-traditional student, a 35-year-old military veteran, and a single mother of two twin children. She started taking classes at the state college when it was known as a community college and then had to join the military to come back to a fully established direct connect program between the state college and the state university. Mira had an onerous start when she transferred to the state university, being a nontraditional student and a mom had added an extra layer of challenges with the burden of too many responsibilities on a personal and professional level. Moreover, since her academic career

has not been consecutive, not all her classes transferred, several requirements including program catalogue have changed, and insufficient information was provided. All these challenges were coupled with the financial stress of not having her full tuition and fees covered by the GI Bill.

Participant 10- Venice: Venice was 22 years old. She transferred to the state university from the state college through the direct articulation program. She switched her major from journalism to creative writing and was supported by success coaches throughout the transfer process. One of the things that she really liked about the state university was that it *offered* a wide selection of *online courses*. She took all her classes online because she was unable of driving to campus and has no financial means to afford living on or close to campus. She enjoyed her online classes because they gave her the ability to work at her own pace and slowly finish off her degree without feeling rushed or being overwhelmed.

Participant 11- Diana: Diana was 22 years old. She moved to Florida from Puerto Rico when she was nine years old. She went through the regular public school system, and then proceeded to attend and graduate from a technical college as a certified pharmacy technician. She expressed that attending the technical college constituted an alternative plan and although she got her certificate, she did not use it. Consequently, she joined the state college for two years and transferred to the state university. At the state college, she took several science classes so that she could be in the medical science track for her bachelor's degree. However, her true fascination was with foreign languages. Hence, she changed her major to undecided until she completed a major exploration program to then switch to her current major, anthropology.

Answering the Research Questions

This study utilizes qualitative research to explore the perspectives of transfer students on transfer and advising services through addressing the following research questions:

- 1- What are the transfer students' perceptions of the transfer and advising services they have received before and during their first year at a large metropolitan research university in Florida?
- 2- What strategies transfer students utilized to overcome their challenges?

Research Question One

The first research question was examined using interview questions one and two. Question one of the interview questions explored the support services the participants' have utilized as well as the experiences with success coaching or advising services before they started at the state university they are currently attending. Conversely, the participants were asked, in interview question two, to elaborate on the services they utilized after their transfer and during their first year at the state university doing in depth into their personal account of these experiences. Additionally, the scope of the questions expanded to examine their perception of their experiences with transfer and advising services during their first year specifically in respect to career goals, major exploration, class selection, policies and procedures, personal and family circumstances, emotional and psychological challenges, and financial barriers (Interview questions 3-9).

Through the collection and analysis of the rich narratives provided by the participants on their experiences with transfer and advising service before transferring and during their first year at the state university, four themes emerged. The four themes that directly corresponded with research question one are the inconsistency between services before transfer and during their first year, the value of personal connections, uncertainty about career pathways and choosing major, and concern that services were responsive not proactive.

Theme 1 – Inconsistency of Services Before Transfer and During First Year

Experiences with Transfer Services and Advising Before Transferring

The responses to the first part of the first research question examining the experiences of the participant with transfer services and advising before they transferred and while they were still at the state college revealed that nine of the participants have utilized transfer services to some extent through their contact with a state university success coach. Their narratives conceptualize the prevalence and the diverse scope of the services provided by transfer and advising services. Four of the participants received limited intervention to accommodate their individual needs before they transferred, while the other five participants received more impactful support and continuous follow up from success coaches, before transferring, to effectively navigate the transition.

Jake has indicated that with extra credits and not completing his associates, he failed to get admission directly to the state university which caused him to feel like he was a “complete fail.” Despite his minimal communication with a success coach, the assistance Jake received has positioned him on the right trajectory:

I had one really good experience where I called the success coach at a college. They hooked me with the guy, and he basically laid out what I had to do to get my associates, and that was the best experience... I went through the program again, and immediately everything went through.

Josh and Brandon share similar experiences pertaining to meeting with the success coaches before they transferred on only two or three occasions and eventually receiving adequate guidance regarding the classes they needed to enroll in so that they could transfer successfully. Josh's interactions with the success coaches seemed to have provided more clarity on what courses he needed to choose to facilitate his transfer into his field of study:

So, they have a folder with all the information. And you know, like all the links and how you could communicate with them. They're really nice and telling me like the direction of where to go for the classes and saying like, Okay, you need to take this class, these are electives, and these ones are going to help you out and stuff like that. So, they kind of had everything like sections and like highlighted, different things. So, I feel like that's good, because without that and without that communication you just receive the sheet, and pick whatever the class is like, you would not know which direction you need to go.

Brandon's received the reassurance that he was on the right track and the courses he was considering at the state college align with the undergraduate major and course catalog requirements of the state university. He shares, "My meetings were before Covid, because they were in-person. Mostly it was because I had questions about the catalog. I wanted to make sure the classes were correct, and then that was about it."

Joe, Rita, Gloria, Venice, and Diana have shared a similar narrative highlighting the extensive support they received from the success coaches while they were at the state college and

before they transferred. Joe explained that the guidance from the coach was valuable in guiding him through the right steps relating to classes he needed to enroll in, forms he needed to complete, and documentation he needed to submit. Moreover, the support that was received equipped student Joe with clear expectations to prepare mentally for the transition by providing clear information about what to expect at the state university in terms of campus and classroom size, as well as the less individualized attention when interacting with professors. Joe added that recognizing and addressing barriers inhibiting a successful transfer was crucial:

He really kept in touch with me, to make sure that I still had my head on straight in regards to like I was still planning to transfer, like he was following up with me to see how I was doing in my classes, how I was handling the challenges of like knowing all the different prerequisites that you have to satisfy...he was always asking me like what my challenges and always addressing my biggest challenges like he helped me to kind of acknowledge myself, ... just yeah, that's very good.

Similarly, Diana met with the coach numerous times and the coach was able to accommodate her needs and provide her with the tools and resources she needed to be more confident and comfortable through the transfer process:

I'd met up with her like so many times because I was so confused... I remember our meetings would be set up for like an hour and we would go well over the hour because she would just give me more time because I think she knew that I just had so many questions and we were just continue to talk. She's like, it's fine. I don't have any other meetings. We could just stay here as long as you need me to stay here and answer your questions.

Likewise, Rita and Venice explained that their success coach maintained contact with them almost every month. The coach provided them with a checklist with all the documents required for admission, including information on the application process and the deadlines. To them, it was extremely significant to have all the information organized and accessible in one place. Rita emphasized the importance of continuous follow up in compelling her to fulfill what was required of her to successfully transfer:

Yeah, there was always follow up. So, like every month or so she would check in with me and say, Okay, well, did you get X Y and Z done? And then she would actually look and check and say, okay well, I see your application and I see you submitted transcripts and I see you did this, good job, now the next step is, and even though I had the checklist. It's reassuring for someone to say, Okay, we have everything... It's very, very helpful to make sure they're staying on top of things, ... I was glad to have that level of accountability.

Finally, Gloria stressed that having received the assistance and support of the coach before transferring is a “game changer” for her because without it she “probably would be stuck.” She portrayed understanding the required steps of the transfer process and deadlines as being tedious and confusing. Gloria added that her coach kept her in check ensuring she had her completed documents in on time but more importantly was the coach’s thorough guidance in making her aware of practical tips for when she started at the state university, “her help with little stuff like, you know, download the App., or we could be full at this parking garage and maybe get there an hour early. Little stuff that made me have a really good experience with her.” The description of Gloria’s experience with success coaching before transferring steered her toward

understanding her strengths and interests which eventually allowed her to decide about choosing a major of study:

She literally called me like every month...she told me ahead of time everything that I needed to know. How are you feeling about this? looking into different majors, because, like I was undecided. Do you want to be a doctor, or a nurse? What do you want to do? What are you passionate about? Kind of figuring out where I wanted to be, and she was discussing all the majors at UCF which is literally amazing... If I didn't have my coach, I probably would have been lost, and I probably wouldn't be at a state university right now.

Experiences with Transfer Services and Advising After Transferring

The second part of the first research question examined the experiences of the participants with transfer services and advising during their first year at the state university. There was a large disparity between services received before the participants transferred, summarized in the above section, compared to their first year at the state university. The participants' narratives conveyed that only two of the participants received robust support from the success coaches that extended after they transferred to the state university, one participant acquired constant guidance from their academic advisor, while the remaining eight participants encountered insufficient guidance from academic advising and no follow up from the success coaches during their first year at the state university.

Rita and Joe disclosed that the success coaches continued their follow up through regularly scheduled meetings. The success coaches allocated exponentially more time to ensure continued support, improve their adjustment, and reduce barriers impeding their mobility. They stated that the coaches being there for them throughout the transition and during their first year had an immense effect on helping them adjust better and develop a greater understanding of what

was required of them in terms of academics and processes. To them, this support was pivotal and necessitated even more as their transition was during the COVID-19 pandemic when all activities were moved to a virtual platform. Joe stated, “The success coach constantly kept in contact with me, just to see how I was doing in my classes, and how I've been handling my coursework... my personal life and everything like that.” Rita added that receiving this support has set her “in the right path and in the right attitude” to start and persist in her first year at the state university.

One participant’s narrative, Gloria, revealed that her academic advisor, in her department at the state university, maintained contact with her during her first year. These interactions invigorated Gloria’s motivation, determination, and enthusiasm:

I probably went to my advisor each semester. Um! She really helped, she said, you got to improve your level, you got to really boost up your grades and stuff like that...she's an advisor in my department, which was amazing, because I don't want anyone else...So it was good to have somebody in my field and in my major. She really helped a lot just to boost me up and put some fire into me.”

On the other hand, the remaining eight participants’ abundant and unencumbered discourse depicted the inadequate support they received from success coaches, advising, or any other support services. Success coaches and advisors neglected to provide personal attention that students felt was needed to get their specific unique questions and needs addressed. Sofia highlighted that she navigated the transition and the first year at the state university on her own with the help of friends. She did not have many options when it came to choosing classes:

This was during covid so like all orientations were online. So, I was just there on my computer like two or three hours, so they just go through the slides, go through the

motion...For when we were like enrolling in class, and advising at that point was just like our orientation leader who was like you should do this. Since I didn't know that I had to enroll in a certain time period, and also my graduation from the state college was very late, because I had to wait for my transcripts, my orientation was a week before class started, so I can only take the classes that were available.

The other participants shared a similar experience with advising compelling them to maneuver their way through the first year with inadequate support. The limited support they received with mapping out the classes and plan of study neither addressed nor combatted the other challenges associated with transition during their first year. The participants struggled to get information or assistance although they all shared a sense of relief once they met with an advisor and got their plan of study mapped out. Here is what some of the participants voiced:

Well, I'm not going to lie, at first it was very difficult getting in touch with the advisors, I don't really remember specifically talking to a success coach. (Josh)

Advisor literally put what I'd have to pick each semester. And that was it. That's what I had to do for the financial assistance for the excess credit hours. But I like that a lot, because up to that point I was following degree audit. So, I think I finished two semesters where I was just saying, Okay, I need this, this and this, and I think I was googling the degree like for the Major. (Jake)

The first semester, it was straightforward. I think it was a success coach who gave me the courses and I put them. Then later on, like for the next semester, it personally went to the business office, asked for advisor but we couldn't even get an appointment we had to do walk-ins, so we had to wait in line. I still went for it, and I got my schedule set, and now I

just do it by myself. I already have my schedule set. So, it was good that was really helpful. (Brandon)

I called to schedule with the elementary education advisors about which courses I should take, and they directed me to this page on like the Elementary Education page on the website which outlined what courses you should take in each semester. And so, I've just used that since to kind of design my schedule and go around that. So, I had that one phone meeting and that's about it. (Pamela)

So, when you first transfer to the university they make me go through student orientation, which was nice, except there are so many students coming in that those students who are coming in may not get their questions answered. I know I had questions, I tried to ask the person who basically said, hey you know everything looks good just go ahead and we'll get you in your first semester and then you can follow up with your own individual counselor or your own individual advisor. That was all cool and all but when I did finally get a hold of my advisor, I didn't really get as many answers as I thought I would because I have that huge gap in my academic career a veteran status which was overwhelming. (Mira)

I mostly use them for like, classes, but sometimes they do check in to ask, like, how I'm doing with, like, with, like, school or life in general and like, I'll answer them, but it's like rare occasions. (Venice)

So, once I moved from the state college, I haven't talked to my coach since then...Once I moved over here, I still don't know what major to do so I talked to the advisor at the

orientation, he's like, if you don't know, you should go to the major exploration program. And that's when I talked to someone else, and they were really helpful. (Diana)

Theme 2 - Value of Personal Connections

Participants shared that the interpersonal relationships with coaches and advisors have influenced their experiences before and after transferring. The common factor was that having these interactions reshaped their experience and resulted in creating deeper connection which led the participants to feel more confident, cared about, and valued. Jake, who was an older married student returning to pursue his education after several years stressed the importance of personal interactions and establishing rapport with one of success coaches before he transferred. The success coach genuinely understood his unique needs which promoted a sense of belonging and helped him feel understood. Jake stated:

He was a human with me... it was a connection...like it made me feel like I belonged in school... he had a similar experience to me ... more individualized support, it'd be nice if the system saw, you know my age or my experience, as non-traditional student that there is like another (names coach) or another person like you that actually can feel what I'm feeling a little bit more.

Joe shared the same perspectives regarding his dealings with a success coach before he transferred to the state university. The coach supported Joe in navigating the transfer process and getting through all the required paperwork. The coach proactively maintained his contact and followed up after Joe successfully transferred to the state university to ensure that they address any impediment along the way. These personal interactions with the coach made Joe feel valued as an individual, he shared:

He was very helpful and he kind of helped to guide me in terms of like getting it, going into the right steps for what I needed to do, and it just all kinds of you know, paperwork and stuff like that that you need to do documentation that you need to fill out. He made sure that he kept really good in contact with me, which made me feel as a student that the university like they really cared about you. That was probably the best thing about having like a success coach.

Additionally, Rita and Diana connected with a success coach who supported them before and after the transfer. Continuous and consistent personal contact by the success coach was effective in leading them to develop a sense of community which was key for them to better acclimate to the university. Rita said the following on her experience:

I believe she checked on me before orientation and after I did orientation. She made herself available so if I ever had a question, I could reach out to her, you know. Send her an email directly and ask her if I needed it... it's definitely good to have that reassurance that the same team, the same people, are still there to support you. I'm pretty sure if I reach out to her now, she would definitely, you know, give me the resources or point me into the direction that I would need to go.

Diana, for example, considered the success coach a front-line resource whom she would resort to whenever she had any questions especially that she had no one to turn to at home being a first-generation student. The coach's empathy and dedication normalized the challenges that Diana was experiencing; it was important for her to have listening ears and guidance from the coach to relieve her anxiety and build her confidence. Diana expressed:

I remember it was like our meetings would be set up for like an hour and we would go well over the hour because she would just give me more time because I think she knew

that I just had so many questions and we were just continue to talk. She's like, It's fine. I don't have any other meeting. We could just stay here as long as you need me to stay here and answer your questions ... She basically like explained everything to me. Like every process. She explained everything in the process. She basically helped me feel less anxious about the whole situation because obviously it's very daunting from like over here... But I had stalled the process so long and I was like, I'm so terrified... she just helped me feel so much like, like it wasn't that hard at all. Like, it's fun. It's not that difficult. This is all you need to do. And she would explain it so well and like, it would make sense and she would make me feel comfortable, like asking her questions. There were no stupid questions.

Theme 3 - Uncertainty About Career Pathways and Choosing Major

The interviews with the 11 participants exploring their experience with advising and transfer services before transferring and during their first year at the state university identified another theme relating to choosing major and career exploration. Nine of the participants conveyed that they received minimal guidance when it came to major exploration or careers before transferring and during the first year at the state university. Brandon expressed that there was no further career exploration beyond what he researched himself, “I guess I decided back in high school with all those experiences that I wanted to go for business, and then I think once I got to college in my first semester I did more research, and I went for finance,” he noted. As for Diana, deciding on a major was an incredibly difficult decision to make. She started as a certified pharmacy technician, then moved to the state college where she took several science courses since she was looking at closely related fields to medicine. She transferred to the state university

as medical science track student before she switched to anthropology. There was not much support with career exploration or choosing majors offered by the coaches while at the state college which accrued additional costs and caused her losing valuable time. She eventually had to join a summer program on major exploration to finally make the switch to anthropology. On her experience with choosing major, Diana details:

Once I moved over here, I still don't know what major to do so I talked to the advisor at the orientation, he's like, if you don't know, you should go for major exploration program. And that's when I talked to someone else, and they were really helpful. They were like this is how this works. These are the majors. Just explore, figure it out. And I took it. I did it over the summer.

Gloria received insufficient academic support and information on researching and deciding on a major that fit her career path. Gloria spent three years at a state college to earn her AA degree given that she changed her major several times including from nursing to kinesiology. She asserted that some coaching or guidance in exploring the different majors and learning about degree options early on from advisors at the state college or success coaches would have been valuable in her deciding on a major and becoming more confident in the path she was taking. She would have appreciated more guidance to frame her educational field within the context of her personal aspirations, interests, and abilities.

I knew I wanted to be in the health world. I wanted to be in the medical field. I just didn't know what. It's such a broad spectrum in the medical field which I didn't even know about certain stuff that I just find out now. So, I remember asking like is there anything else I could do in the medical field that fits me. And so, I remember her saying she really doesn't know, because you know, like I said, the advisors at any college, they don't really

know. They're just thinking about basic things like just finishing your AA degree, and then you move to the university.

I wanted to know am I in the right position to do this? What do they recommend? Are my credits okay? So, my transcripts look good, but like what am I getting myself into? And I felt like the adviser knew and they've gone through it, of course, themselves. But I felt like they would know that a lot of students do this, they make this mistake or that mistake. So, I wanted that adviser to just share some experiences with me in terms of if I'm going down the right road. You know this is the goal I want to accomplish, and I just wanted to know if I was going down that right path, or if I'm going in the wrong direction. What direction do I need to really go into. (Gloria)

Similarly, Josh who was majoring in integrated business after he switched from management clarified that he always knew he wanted a career in the business field because his family owned a business with which he helped occasionally. He added that he was always surrounded by “business talk all throughout the house and all throughout his life,” but he was not sure what major aligned with his career trajectory. He described his interactions with advising and coaches as follows:

I've talked to them a lot about what I wanted to do. They thought that management was a good field to start with, and they also said that if you're passionate about it to just keep going with it. You know it wasn't that much like communication with them, I already know what I want and they kind of mutually agreeing to just go forward with it the whole time. I didn't really have any like continuing conversations about the major selection.

For Jake and Venice, choosing a major of study was based on convenience and prior work experience not due to learning about the different career paths or clarifying their professional

goals with a coach or advisor. Jake changed majors from biochemical science to computer science because they were online which fits his work schedule and the other responsibilities that he had to juggle outside the classroom being an older married student. As for Venice, the main factor influencing her decision of choosing an academic major is whether the program has an online flexibility; she decided on journalism for its online component and then changed to creative writing which was also mostly online.

The biochemistry professors all want you in class all the time. Whereas the computer science I transferred to, which was my minor, all the comp science professors are adopting to basically all online, mostly where you only have to go and take tests and stuff. So, I've ended up putting my major as comp science. That's where I'm at right now. Um, I've always been a techie. That's what I was going for work, and I've always done it for work. (Jake)

The only reason I picked journalism was because it was recommended to me due to how flexible it was. Okay. So that's one of the major reasons I picked it. But I did stay in it because of the writing aspect. And then once I found out about the creative writing opportunity here at the university, I knew I had to switch. So, I'm not like really interested in like reporting or the news, but like writing and stories, yes. (Venice)

As for Joe and Sofia, they had prior knowledge regarding the career field they were interested in, however, they did not receive guidance defining the next steps and deciding what major fit best their personal interests and goals. Joe always knew he wanted to be a psychiatrist or a mental health professional so he could aid people struggling with mental health or crisis. To reach his end goal, he decided to major in psychology as a path to medical school which was challenging. For Sofia, her choice of major was based on her own personal passion for medicine

and limited guidance from a staff member at the state college who cross-referenced what field she was going into at the state university with the classes she needed to take. Like Joe, she would have benefited from deciphering further with a success coach or advisor the degree that best fit her passion so that she could take the prerequisite courses which would transfer over into her major of choice.

I already knew that I wanted to major in psychology in high school, so I don't think I received any kind of guidance... success coach he kind of told me he definitely kind of opened my eyes about like the different challenges that I would face being a Psyche and going to medical school. (Joe)

Yeah, I would say I've always had an inkling of medicine, and I always liked the medicine route and everything. So, it was like either biology or I didn't know really what the majors were so it's where she kind of broke down everything that the majors do, and like the different classes. (Sofia)

Theme 4 - Services were Responsive not Proactive

The participants have expressed that their interactions with transfer and advising services were initiated by the students. In numerous cases, it was the participants who reached out and solicited the coaches and advisors for the resources they needed to navigate their transition to the state university. Pamela sought advising to learn more about choosing courses and the advisors were able to assist by referring her online where she could find the courses she needed to take. Pamela commented that advising was not “something that I referred back to at all. It's a net, I had questions setting everything up for myself and establishing what I needed to do, then from there I was ready to take over.” Furthermore, there was no attempt to target or contact Brandon even

after indicated he was going to transfer. While at the state college, he reached out to the coaches to get information about the process. When asked if he received any follow up or support during his first year, Brandon reflected on his experience saying, “It was in my last two semesters that I really was more, focused. And then I just went to the office and asked for information. I was just wanted to verify the classes that I need to take.” On receiving assistance with exploring his field of study and choosing a major, he added. “No, not really. Not that I remember. You know they just provide the information you request.”

Jake attributes the lack of follow up to the size of the organization. He struggled to identify the best route to earn his bachelor’s degree after a long break; he had to return to the state college, where he initially completed an excess number of credits, to take few more courses and earn his AA which will allow him to transfer. He was not only trying to unravel the transfer process but also deciding on the courses he needed to take and the major of study. In his case, neither the coaches nor the advisors were effective in rendering holistic support beyond the questions the student presented. Jake, like several other participants, got his queries answered after eventually connecting with a coach or advisor. However, the assistance he received was limited in scope to answering his specific questions without further follow up. Mira and Josh communicated the same perspective when seeking advising for guidance with course selection, they had to initiate contact and maintain follow up with the advisor at the state university. Below was how they reflected on their experience.

It was a responsive thing, it's them responding to my request, because I was going to them with an issue and they say do this and that, wasn't a discussion, they were like you just have to do A and B C and D ... the bigger it gets like with any industry, the less

there's going to be personal support. You're going to sacrifice that one-on-one personalization. (Jake)

With the state university, that first advisor was in orientation. And I did an entire year without advising. And then this year, I'm starting my second year, I talked to an advisor and she's like, Yeah, you're okay. And I'm like, But I don't feel like I'm okay ... I will be meeting with my academic advisor after the semester is over. Just to just to reiterate and touch base with her and be like, hey, like I'm still feeling some apprehension about my actual course and the directness of it. And I'm wondering if you could help me. (Mira)

I commuted about thirty thirty-five minutes ... so I had to go early on those Wednesdays for the walk-ins if I ever wanted to communicate with them. I feel like overall communication when you were talking to them is helpful, but the process of trying to talk to them is a little rough. I feel like sometimes like I can't really talk or get my answer on the phone, and every time I tried to book an appointment on online, they would be all full. Basically, the only time I could show up is if I were really early for the walk in. Even sometimes, if I'm five minutes in for the walk in, they still didn't even take me right away. I mean the overall communication has been shaky, but when I get the chance to talk to them, they could be really helpful. (Josh)

On the breadth of services being passive and limited in scope to the students' specific needs, Sofia expressed that she tried to contact the coaches before transferring to obtain information on the transfer process. She was not able to go see them in person due to the COVID-19 pandemic and having the services transitioned online. She critiqued the coaches who she emailed by saying, "but I don't remember them reaching back to me, or like giving me any

like valuable information all I got was like you had to apply when you were forty-five credits in.”

Lastly, Venice sought assistance after being dropped from classes due to an issue that hindered receiving financial aid on time. She had to continue to facilitate and liaison between the federal student aid (FAFSA), the advisors, and the university’s financial aid office to get the accurate information and resolve her issue. She also had to continue following up every semester to ensure aid is disbursed and applied to her account on time to not jeopardize her classes being dropped. Venice remarked:

It was a bit more frustrating than I expected because the way the information that the school has versus the information that the FAFSA has is a bit different. Like the school doesn't have everything. So, like the school will tell me one thing and then I'll go to the FAFSA site, and they'll tell me another thing. And then they're each not contacting each other. So, like, I'm I would have to be the middleman ... there's always that fear of, okay, if I don't get my funds in time, even if I'm doing the work now, I can get kicked out of the class and then I have to re-sign up for it. But then if the class is full, then I have to wait till next semester and take it over again.”

Research Question Two

The interviews conducted with the participants gave insights on the strategies and support systems they utilized to overcome their challenges. After meticulously reviewing the narratives of transfer students on how they encountered difficulties and the resources they used, the findings correlated with the social support and strategies referred to in the Four S’s of Schlossberg's Transition Theory. For individuals to navigate the unexpected challenges that

could arise from the anticipated transition of graduating from the state college and starting at a state university, three themes were identified. The three themes that correlated directly with research question two were the guidance from other staff and professors, support of family and friends, and information from online resources.

Theme 1 - Guidance from Other Staff and Professors

The participants resorted to a wider support network of staff and professors to receive additional information and answers to their queries as it related to academics as well as university policies and procedures. The social network of staff and professors influenced positively the transfer students' experience, clarified expectations, and familiarized them with different aspects of navigating the challenges of their new journey. It was frequently noted through the interviews that the staff and professors played a role in helping the participants better adjust and succeed in classes that might be online or large where establishing personal connections with other classmates is difficult.

One of the participants, Gloria, shared that she was grateful for support of her professors after transferring to the state university who informed her of tutoring services on campus as well as internship opportunities and even offered to write recommendation letters. This instilled a sense of reassurance knowing that professors were intentional about facilitating students' success. Gloria added:

I didn't really have anyone, really I was kind of like figuring it out by myself just discovering new things. I feel like the professors probably made that impact on me because they would make those announcements, you know, this is what's going on in campus, if you're interested in certifications, if you want to do this, I feel like the

professors did more of that for me...I could always ask any of my professors. That's the good thing about my first semester. I had a lot of good professors that were like if you need anything, reach out.”

By the same token, Venice commends her professor who provided her with career exploration resources, emphasized her strengths, and directed her on how to apply her strengths in a career she was passionate about. She commented:

My professor, actually, he was the one that gave me like a list of different types of job opportunities because he liked what I was doing in his class, ... he gave me a lot of resources about saying, okay, you might not want to do this, but you have expertise in all these other things... and I was grateful for that.

Similarly, several other participants relayed favorable feedback on the support of their professors. Rita stated, “It was definitely encouraged with the professors that I have had to reach out to them during office hours or send them a message if I ever needed any assistance.” Other participants responded with the following:

I would email my professors, and they were very helpful. Really very accommodating. I remember my epidemiology professor. I emailed her. I'm like, I'm so sorry but I am trying to finish this assignment. Can I turn it in like after twelve? She's like that's totally fine. I know that you are a transfer student. She said I know you're transferred and getting acquainted with everything. So let me know if you need any help. So, my professors are really nice about that. (Sofia)

After Covid, I think it was mostly just asking people... So, I just asked professors there as well. And then I was in another scholarship program... so they have knowledge. They

have many students that have transferred. So, I just asked as well like, you know, what should I do. (Brandon)

In addition to professors, the participants discussed the role of other staff members and campus resources that favorably influenced their experience with the transfer process and throughout their first year. Sofia recalled her freshman advisor who went out of her way to prepare her for what was ahead and what to expect ensuring that Sofia was on the right track:

That was my freshman advisor at the state college, and she did sit down with me for like a good hour, I would say, and she just showed me the whole state university website, because I told her about my plans of like going to pre-med like a medical route stuff, and she told me all of the different majors that the university had to offer...she really went in depth with all of that, making sure that everything I took would transfer over and I wouldn't have to retake any classes or miss any pre-requisites.

Moreover, Mira shared her personal experience as a single mom of young twins. She emphasized the importance of having and knowing about campus resources like childcare and counseling to support with the load of scrambling between competing priorities of taking care of family and achieving her education and career goals. Even though in her particular situation Mira was not able to fully take advantage of these services at the time due to many other family obligations, her plea reflects what she endured as a non-traditional transfer student from taking care of young children, meeting deadlines and requirements for classes, keeping up with job responsibilities, and managing financial stress. Mira reflected on her experience and the assistance she received from the veteran center on campus saying:

My kids are three, so, yeah. So post-partum depression hit really hard. I had some family losses, with, you know, COVID and everything like that. It's just been one thing after

another, seemingly. And I haven't utilized some of the help and services that I could be utilizing simply because I don't have the time to do it. Because I'm a single parent of twin boys and people say it takes a village. Where is my village?... Counseling and the tutoring, I feel like those would have been like my saviors... The one thing that has helped me, honestly, has been the work the Veterans Center, they helped a little bit.”

Finally, Rita went on to affirm the importance of shared experiences to establish rapport and provide better communication and understanding. Rita recognizes that she was able to connect better with teaching assistants having followed a similar trajectory like hers, they empathized, motivated, and supported her when facing academic difficulties:

The teaching assistants, I know specifically in one course that I had, they were honest and open. They were like, this was probably the hardest course I ever took in my time, but I made it through, and this is how I did it. Giving me, you know, sharing their experience and their examples, definitely helped me a lot to again know that they've already been through this. They've experienced the same exact thing that I'm already going through, and this is how they managed to make it through to be successful at this course, or even so successful within the university.

Theme 2 - Support of Family and Friends

The rich narrative provided by the participants captured the wide range of support that they received from family and friends. The participants turned to and leaned on family, friends, and spouses for support and guidance. Family and friends were essential components in providing resources and motivation as well as improving the transfer students overall experience and adjustment.

Jake emphasized the invaluable role his spouse played in motivating him to return to school after being away for several years and pushing him to be more persistence when his morale plummeted. Jake recognized that he would not be at the state university right now if it was not for her unwavering commitment to his success. Jake stated:

My wife's determinism and her realization of helping me get over with swishy, emotional person. My wife being like, don't take it personally and just do A, B and C. That helped me get through it, or else I wouldn't be here right now. If the professor and the person was passionate, I would feed on that, and I would learn the material, and if the person was checked out, I would check out. But my wife was pushing me through.

Likewise, as a single mom, Mira had to reach out to family members to provide support with challenges of taking care of her twins while pursuing her education which she described as a "very huge load to handle." She appreciated the few hours her sister contributed to look after her twins, "my sister has been helping me to take care of my kids. Literally only like three or 4 hours, one morning a week. So, all of the rest of my study gets done at night after my kids are asleep."

Moreover, Venice's mom played a central role as she was involved in every step of the transfer process where there were several communications between Venice and transfer services on what documents needed to be submitted and when, "I did a lot of phone calls just talking with people. My mom was there through most of it." Venice's mother also provided Venice with resources she might need to assist her with personal challenges during the first year, Venice adds, "my mother, because she went here before, she actually sent me the emails of some people that could help me with questions I may have. So that helped me out."

Besides family members, transfer students resorted to their friends' provision of social support to enhance their resilience, better adjust to their new environment, and gain an understanding of the policies and procedures. In her first year at the state university, Sofia sought the assistance of her friend, who was attending the state university, in choosing courses that she needed to take:

My friend, she is also a pre-med here, and she's honestly the one who's helped me the most ... I also have a lot of friends who were here already, so I knew the majority of the things. But for students who are like just transferring out of the gate. It would have been a little intimidating.

Sofia also explained how her friends influenced her first year at the state university, she continued by saying:

They did give me a lot of confidence, and they are very motivating. So, they do tell me like you've got this. Send me your course schedule that you have, and like I'll see what I can fix around with. But I kind of have been on my own for the majority of the time, and just relied on also my friends who are in the same major and same course, Same field.

The same also applied to other participants who found a resource in their friends which actively contributed to enhancing their overall experience. Gloria's support system consisted of family and friends who helped her in dealing with psychological and emotional challenges moving into a new bigger campus where she had limited personal connections, she stated, "I think if I was living on campus, I would use those resources and they would be beneficial for me. But since I'm outside, and I have family and friends to lean on outside of school." Others depended on their friends to familiarize themselves with policies and procedures at the state university and grapple with the different requirements. They shared the following:

I didn't get any assistance. I experienced it myself, you know, I don't know if it was better, but for me it was better because I had a friend, so I experienced it together with him, so it's not bad, but other people who don't have like a friend, it's harder. (Brandon) I haven't really talked to anybody about like specifically, like. Oh, what should I do if I do this, or stuff like that. I kind of rely on my judgement and friends who have been here for four years already. (Sofia)

I have my friends at the state university while I was at the state college, so communicating with them and knowing how the process goes at the state university made my transition easier. I would talk to my friend, he'd say, you need to do this and that, which was kind of somehow similar to state college. Once I transferred over, I kind of saw how it was. It was like a smooth transition. (Josh)

Theme 3 - Information from Online Resources

Transfer students relied on online resources as a strategy to tackle difficulties associated with transition. This was crucially important to facilitate understanding and reduce stress of the new transition to the state university especially with the unanticipated event of having the COVID-19 Pandemic forcing people to lock down and operate virtually in the online platform. For Gloria, having online sessions was essential to get information about her intended major and the university. On the numerous virtual sessions she received during Covid year, she explains, "They really helped, like information sessions about Kinesiology, information sessions about physical therapy, information sessions about the university in general. Those really helped me because me because I love to learn, and I have a gradual understanding of stuff."

For Gloria, Brandon, and Sofia the online resources allowed them to become more acquainted with campus resources. The online orientation and interactive sessions contributed to their confidence and readiness for the first year at the state university by knowing where and how to find resources and access additional information that they might need in their first year. Gloria specifically detailed that she downloaded the university's online application which was ideal after transferring to figure out the campus resources, "If I wanted to know more about like the wellness center, I would just go online and look it up and it was plain clear to me." Brendan portrayed a comparable experience on getting support regarding financial assistance and scholarship information available for students, he affirmed, "I think it's just you have the information there, and it's up to you to manage it. I think I've seen some pamphlets, and I also have friends. Friends send them to me or just read more about it on the website." Sofia described the online orientation by saying, "In orientation, they did give us a web courses. So that is something I do refer to sometimes. And I look back. I'm like, oh, okay, I am interested in that ... yes orientation and again, the slides, he slides I always remember. Yea orientation teaches you about a lot of the resources here."

For other participants, like Rita and Pamela, using the state university's online course audit tool enabled them to map their plan of study, select the courses that align with their major, and track their progress. Not only did this academic advising tool enable them to plan and select the right courses more efficiently, but it was also convenient and accessible to students during Covid or when they were not able to come in person to the campus and meet with an advisor. This is what these participants recounted:

It kind of built up a schedule for me based off of the list of classes that I still need to take in order to complete my bachelor's degree. So, it's definitely helpful having the online

tools when I don't have an advisor. If it's 3AM and I'm just absolutely paranoid like about what class I need to take next having those tools online has definitely been very helpful.

(Rita)

What was very helpful is they sent me to the website, where it breaks down the courses.

There's a page on the university's website that does it. And so, it was saying, like freshman, first semester, second semester...etc. And so, I'm looking at that and looking at what I had been able to take at the state college, and then seeing what was still missing was very helpful. I think I'm more of a visual person anyway, so if they would have just told me what courses to take, I wouldn't have done anything. Because they referred me to that information on that web page that has helped me tremendously, even now with scheduling every semester. (Pamela)

Summary

In this chapter, an introduction was presented recapitulating the purpose of the study and the research questions to be explored. This was followed by introducing and analyzing the demographic characteristics of the 11 participants interviewed for this study and relating their stories through the participants' profile section.

Results of the two qualitative research questions were discussed next. The first question examining the data obtained from the open-ended questions of the interview on the experiences of students with advising and transfer services before and after transferring, revealed that nine of the participants have utilized transfer services to some extent before they transferred. However, during their first year at the state university, only two of the participants received continuous support from the success coaches, one participant accepted constant guidance from the academic

advisor, whereas the remaining eight participants had limited guidance from academic advising and no support from success coaching. The chapter progresses to discuss the results of the second research question on how transfer students overcome barriers in their transition to the state university and in their first year. The participants shared that they relied on staff members and professors, family and friends, and online resources.

The next chapter is the Discussion Chapter and the last chapter of this study. It will include a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Introduction

In Chapter IV, the researcher presented the participants' profiles and provided insights into the common themes that emerged after meticulously examining the rich narratives the participants provided in the interviews. Chapter V is the final chapter, and it outlines the summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications for practice, recommendations for further research, and a conclusion. This chapter further discusses the findings and elaborates on the concepts explored in this study in the light of the results. It aims to discuss the practical implications of the results on higher education institutions and student support services as well as offer suggestions for further research. Finally, the chapter ends with a conclusion section that synthesizes and summarizes the chapter.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of transfer students in their first year at the state university with transfer and advising services they received before and during their first year to get an insight regarding the challenges they face and establish whether these services were effective in helping students overcome challenges. To gain a deeper understanding of the transfer student experience, this study used a qualitative approach to address the following two research questions:

3. What are the transfer students' perceptions of the transfer and advising services they have received before and during their first year at a large metropolitan research university in Florida?
4. What strategies transfer students utilized to overcome their challenges?

Participants in this study were selected by sending a mass email solicitation to all transfer students in their first year at a large metropolitan public university in Florida. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board at the institution, in-depth interviews were conducted with eleven transfer students who have utilized the transfer and advising services provided by the state university. All participants have completed an AA degree at the state college and transferred to the state university through the direct articulation program the state university has established with the different state colleges in Florida. Due to the COVID -19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom. The researcher then transcribed the interviews using the Zoom transcription feature as well as the Sonix transcription software for only 3 of the interviews. Following that, the researcher used thematic analysis to make sense of the data. She read and reread the transcriptions thoroughly, comparing them to the recording while making necessary edits to ensure accuracy. Using the coding process, she was then able to generate and name the recurring themes from the rich data that was collected.

Four themes emerged relating to the first research question. First, the experiences with transfer and advising services before transferring were not consistent amongst the 11 participants. While four participants received limited support before they transferred, the other five participants received comprehensive support and regular communication to meet their needs. Next, participants found value in the personal connections they established with coaches and advisors before and after transferring which resulted in strengthening their sense of belonging and resiliency in overcoming any uncertainties. Moreover, the data identified that guidance on career preparation and identifying majors that align with the participants' career path was relatively scarce with several having to change majors more than once. The last theme revealed that the transfer and advising services did not offer proactive services resulting in participants

initiating contact and following up to address concerns and answer queries. The generated themes in response to the second research question on how the participants overcame challenges showed that they have utilized different support systems including guidance from other staff and professors, support of family and friends, and information from online resources.

This study sought to gain better understanding of the experiences of transfer students with transfer and advising services before and during their first year within the context of Schlossberg's Transition Theory. The theory provides an ideal framework for this study exploring how transfer students go through the transition from the state college to a 4-year state university. Their narratives detail how the four elements of Schlossberg theory: situation, self, support, and strategies have influenced the participants' ability to adjust to the changes and challenges associated with the transition. Using Schlossberg as a theoretical framework for this study is emphasized in trying to fully understand how participants move in and through the transition to a more stable phase where they are better adjusted academically and personally to the new life at the state university.

Schlossberg defines transitions as anticipated allowing individual to be better prepared, and unanticipated where change is unpredictable and unexpected where decision must be made swiftly and hastily altering or interrupting, in varied degrees, the anticipated course of action (Evans et al., 2010). The participants in this study were taking steps in preparing for the anticipated transition from the state college to the state university including working with success coaches, making sure they take all required classes to meet their AA requirement, meeting deadlines for applications, submitting required forms, or doing orientations. However, unanticipated transitions, including the COVID-19 pandemic in addition to the several challenges transfer students go through, have caused disruption for the students and an added

stressor that no one was prepared for. For Mira, one of the participants in this study, the transition to the state university was predictable; however, it brought along several unpredictable challenges that she was not expecting. She was not prepared for the extra load of having to care for her young twins as single mom and dealing with financial constraints while going through the transition. Although the participants' stories and circumstances might be different, using Schlossberg's theory as a blueprint for this study undergirds a coherent and solid understanding of their experiences and the resources they have utilized to respond to the transition and overcome challenges.

Discussion of the Findings

In reviewing previous literature relating to transfer students' experiences, several researchers (Grites, 2013; Porchea, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010; Huriya, McKinnon-Crowley, & Serrata, 2019; Fowler and Boylan, 2010) examined and discussed the personal, psychological, and institutional challenges that could potentially impede the transition of transfer students from the state college and into the state university. Existing research has also established the pivotal role of support services in assisting students better adjust as well as the value of holistic coaching and advising to increase students' resilience, retention, and graduation (Capstick et al., 2019; Robinson, 2015; Alzen et al., 2021). This section will discuss the findings of the two research questions in relationship with the existing literature and the Schlossberg Transition Theory, the theoretical framework for this study.

Research Question One

What are the transfer students' perceptions of the transfer and advising services they have received before and during their first year at a large metropolitan research university in Florida?

Research Q1: Relationship of Findings to the Literature

A review of the literature relating to the role of advising services established a correlation between supportive staff and positive student experiences. It is argued that effective academic advising can make transition smoother by removing barriers that deter retention especially when advising is personalized and when advisors are knowledgeable. (Montag et al., 2012; Tinto, 1991; Turner & Thompson, 2014). Additionally, new support models like success coaching providing targeted support to students and offering holistic advising that addresses academic, personal, career, and psychological challenges facing transfer students would promote positive student experiences. Success coaching will not replace advising but complement and supplement services to better assist students in attaining necessary skills and ensuring they reach personal and academic goals. (Neuhauser & Weber 2011; Pechac & Slantcheva-Durst, 2019; Alzen et al., 2021; Farrell, 2007). This is especially true when transfer students consist of diverse student demographics including non-traditional students. Non-traditional students, who are older in age and face juggling competing responsibilities, would benefit from personalized support services that address their unique needs and provide them with tools to create meaningful experiences and alleviate challenges of navigating the transition as well as their educational journey at the state university. (Kachur & Barcinas, 2020; Erisman, & Steele 2015; Cepeda et al, 2021).

The results of this study support the previous findings in the literature regarding the role of advising and coaching in altering the experiences of transfer students, specifically non-

traditional students who require additional support. It is not surprising that the perceptions of the non-traditional students in this study with transfer and advising services vary significantly according to the degree of assistance they have received. The more personalized assistance and support they experienced, acknowledging and accommodating their distinctive struggles and needs, the more satisfied and engaged they were. Three of the eleven participants in this study were non-traditional students in their mid to late thirties who have explicitly indicated that they faced a plethora of challenges throughout the transfer process and in their first year in the state university. For Jake, one of the participants, the experiences with transfer and advising services did not meet his expectations. Jake was married, working full time, and returning to continue his studies after several years. Although he had one positive interaction with a success coach who could relate to him, overall, it was difficult for Jake to feel connected, supported, understood, or valued. “The bigger the institution gets like with any industry, the less there's going to be personal support. You're going to sacrifice that one-on-one personalization. So, I don't take it personally, I just don't see it happening,” Jake expressed on the lack on personalized services and follow up.

For Mira, a 35-year-old veteran and single mom who returned to continue her studies after more than 15 years shared a similar perspective like Jake. She states, “when I look for the advisors, ... three are the main ones, and they have the entire alphabet. I don't know, I looked at the website, and like it was just strange, I was really surprised to see the way the students have been split, and from the outside looking in, I just looked at it, thinking dang they must be really overwhelmed because that is a lot. I don't know if that plays into not being able to have the information that I need, but it might, from a student's speculative standpoint.” Mira spoke candidly of the psychological, emotional, and academic challenges that transfer students like her

go through. During her transfer and first year at the state university, she had to cope with stress from the pandemic; deal with the loss of someone close; take care of little kids; and adjust to a bigger campus, less personalized attention, and larger classrooms. The feelings of emotional stress, isolation, transfer shock, and being “lost in the crowd” were overwhelming and not met with receiving creative solution or relevant support services to navigate the intersectionality of these different challenges.

Rita’s perception of the transfer and advising services she received before and during their first year at the state university differs from that of Jake and Mira. As a non-traditional student returning after a 12-year halt and trying to maintain the balance of working full time and going to classes, having the support of a success coach better prepared her for what to expect at the state university and equipped her with the information and tools to overcome culture shock. The success coach reached out to her before her transfer and prompted her throughout the entire transition. For Rita, she “developed that rapport, that relationship” with the success coach which she describes as “refreshing” to have one person who was directly working on everything with her, providing feedback, and guiding her through the process. The individualized intervention of the coach led to Rita establishing clear direction and goals subsequently cultivating a sense of belonging and reassurance.

Research Q1: Relationship of Findings to the Theoretical Framework

The perceptions of transfer students with transfer and support services before and after the transition can be viewed within the framework of Schlossberg’s Transition Theory. Through the lens of this theory, coaches and advisors can develop a better understanding of the characteristics and the individuality of each of the transfer students and facilitate the creation of interventions and resources to better serve them and improve upon their experiences. To

influence the perception of transfer students positively, transfer and support services should have a comprehensive understanding of the uniqueness and diversity in the transfer students' demographics and how these students are impacted by the transition considering the type, context, and impact of the transition. By way of background, the type of the transition refers to whether it is expected or not, the context focuses on the relationship transfer students have with the transition as well as the setting, and the impact pertains to the degree the transition alters the transfer students' routine. The participants had a unique experience of transferring in the middle of a pandemic when all colleges and universities made a switch to online services and instruction. This unanticipated challenge has influenced students' experiences and perceptions about transfer and support services. Students' experiences were altered dramatically because of the unanticipated transition as they were not able to interact with their specific advisors or coaches face to face not even during orientation that was also held online. Taking into consideration this unanticipated challenge in relation to the individual had a huge impact on the transfer students and how they coped with the transition. The participants' perceptions and attitudes about the new transition, whether anticipated or unanticipated, are affected by the personal attributes of each individual, the relationship of the individual with his context or his environment, and the support they receive from transfer and support services.

The transfer and support services have a paramount role in recognizing that the transfer from the state college to the state university, with both its anticipated and unanticipated transitions, is convoluted resulting in stress and making coping especially difficult for transfer students. Advisors and success coaches need to be diligent in connecting transfer students to resources, familiarizing them with policies and procedures, supporting them with personal and academic skills they need to support them through the different stages of the transition.

Additionally, they should be purposeful and proactive in connecting and following up with all transfer students as well as providing them with a holistic approach to support them navigate the challenges of the new environment resulting in a more meaningful experience and favorable perceptions of these services. It is evident from the findings that the adjustment of transfer students, particularly nontraditional students, positively correlates with the connection and the degree of support they receive from support services.

Research Question Two

What strategies transfer students utilized to overcome their challenges?

Research Q2: Relationship of Findings to the Literature

As evidenced in the review of the literature, transfer students like the participants identified in this study faced numerous challenges. As discussed in Chapter two, transfer students face numerous barriers including personal and emotional. The findings also support previous studies in literature that the majority of transfer students are members of racial, low-income, or minority ethnic groups (Fischer, 2007; Jabbar et al., 2019) which adds an additional layer of challenges. As discussed in Chapter four, ten out of the eleven participants received financial assistance including nine participants receiving the need-based Pell grant. This had an influence on participants' availability, since they were compelled to balance work and school; their ability to take face to face classes; and the possibility of commuting and living on or near campus. Moreover, the participants also struggled with emotional stress associated with transfer shock. Transfer shock is real. The participants, similar to findings from existing research, were overwhelmed trying to adjust and cope with a new academic institution with different policies and procedures, bigger campus, larger classrooms sizes, less personalized attention, and different

academic environment (Chin-Newman & Shaw, 2013; Townsend, B. K. 2008). Brandon, one of the participants, summarized this vividly saying:

I didn't get any assistance, and that's definitely something I think that could be improved, because it's a big change, you know, going from college to university is a huge difference not only in size, but everything. Once you get in, it's the size of the classes, the parking lots, how to get to the classrooms, and then everything is just different getting to the clubs, learning more about how to inscribe the careers, how to use the university resources like the online student portal, I still think I don't know everything about it. So that's something that could really be improved on."

Several other participants reported a sense of isolation described by Mira as being "lost in the crowd type of shuffle feeling." Jake is also inundated by the size of campus that he tried to "avoid going to campus as much as possible, because I did grow up there, and now it's so big." In addition, the participants had to upend the COVID-19 pandemic which has taken a toll on their mental and emotional wellbeing. Going through COVID, losing someone close, having to take care for little kids, having to work while having a full load of study, and maneuvering a larger campus are some of the hitches associated with the transition.

Research Q2: Relationship of Findings to the Theoretical Framework

The findings of Research Question two, as presented in Chapter four, are positioned within Schlossberg's 4 key factors that influenced how the participants faced and coped with challenges associated with their transition from state college to the state university before and during their first year at the state university. The four S system or what is known as the "4S's" refers to situation, self, support, and strategies. The first S stands for situation which varies from one individual to the other depending on the timing of the transition, the duration of the

transition, prior experiences or skills in dealing with similar situations, and other stress factors the individual is experiencing during the time of the transition. The second S is for self, and it refers to personal resources including demographics like gender and socio-economics status, and psychological as the person's outlook and resiliency. The third S is for the support system of family members and friends as well as the institution. Finally, the last S stands for the strategies and skills individuals use to better acclimate to the new situation. (Evans et al., 2010; Goodman et al., 2006)

The participants' reaction to the challenges associated with the transition was closely influenced by Schlossberg's first S: situation. Although the participants anticipated the transfer to the state university allowing for a more effective and linear preparation, the timing of the transition during a pandemic led to unprecedented disruption to people's lives and livelihoods worldwide. The participants in this study suffered an onerous impact that affected all facets of their life specifically their educational journey making it more arduous to deal with the challenges of transition. For instance, Jake, Pamela, Rita, and Josh found the online orientation tedious failing to adequately prepare them for the transition. Jake preferred a face-to-face orientation which would have allowed for more interaction and addressing transfer students' concerns and queries. Pamela does not recall much of the information covered in the short online orientation session and Rita described it as "crazy" period when even new student orientation was done via Zoom. Furthermore, Josh revealed that the transfer was "shaky" due to offices being shut down and his inability to reach any support services which made transition even more difficult. Likewise, Gloria's overall experience was affected, she shared that everything constituted a "stressor" for her, part of it was because she felt isolated and could not meet anyone. Venice detailed how challenging it was to make the shift from classroom to online and

having to adapt to new ways of learning content during a period where a lot of uncertainty prevailed. She added that she faced several drawbacks including navigating the online platform and the sorting out technical difficulties that both the professors and she were enduring. The COVID pandemic that extended over a period of two years and the transition to remote instruction and services caused additional stressors making conquering challenges of transitioning and starting the first year at a state university even more taxing.

Second, the self-factor of Schlossberg's theory is an essential component to consider when exploring how the participants managed the challenges of the transition. Their age, socioeconomic status, and outlook prompted their views and reaction towards the transition. For some participants, like Jake for example, not being admitted directly to the state university and having to return to the state college to complete few courses was discouraging especially considering his age being an older student. This influenced his motivation and overall morale. Similarly, Mira's age, financial struggles, and family commitment added additional stress that affected her zeal to mitigate challenges. She realized she needed to benefit from additional strategies and on campus resources, yet she remained determined to complete her degree. For Jake and Mira, attributes like being flexible, learning and exposing themselves to new methods of doing things, and taking advantage of available resources were imperative to increase their valor. On the other hand, Rita who was also an older student, was a bundle of positive energy. Her aspiration of becoming a physical therapist was a motivating force for her to cope with any barriers she faced. Sofia also had a positive outlook regarding the transition despite challenges. For Sofia, being from a low-income family, she did not even think that going to college was an option and was excited to learn about scholarship opportunities that paved the way for her to attend college and transfer to a university to pursue her dream of being a doctor and helping

others. For Rita and Sofia embracing an optimistic mindset increased confidence and resourcefulness in addressing challenges. Therefore, the “self” influenced, in varied degrees, how the participant of this study reacted to, interacted with, interpreted, and responded to challenges.

Moreover, in respect to the support factor, the unwavering support of family, the engagement of friends, and the guidance of other staff and professors have been instrumental in helping the participants react to and cope with challenges of transition. Jake’s wife was his support system, the driving force steering him thorough the transition journey and throughout his first year at the state university anytime he felt like giving up. Friends also influenced the participants’ resilience and their overall experience positively. They helped them confront and overcome several of the barriers associated with the transfer, including culture shock, by familiarizing them to campus, choosing courses, and connecting them to resources. Sofia explained how her friends increased her confidence and motivation while Gloria’s family and friends helped her in dealing with psychological and emotional challenges. Faculty and staff constituted another support element. Rita’s experience with her professor who understood her situation as a transfer student trying to navigate her way around assisted her with managing assignments’ deadlines. Participants reported that faculty members were accommodating and patient in rendering additional support via email and during office hours while staff fostered a trusting relationship with some by connecting them to the different available resources and cultivating their skills and strengths to ameliorate issues.

The last S in Schlosberg’s transition theory is strategies. As evidenced by the findings of this study, the participants employed several strategies to overcome challenges, most notably was the use of online resources. Some of the participants utilized the online course audit to draft their

plan of study and decide what classes to take especially during the pandemic where accessing support services was not always feasible. Others have found value in the online information sessions and other videos including the virtual campus tours which were convenient for students to access at their own time and refer to when needed. Finally, as universities were attempting to return to pre-pandemic operation, the participants adopted webcourses provided as part of the online orientation to successfully orient themselves with campus, answer inquiries they might have, and locate campus resources including the wellness center, health center, counseling services, and financial aid.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have expansive implications for higher education institutions relating to transfer and advising services. Most transfer students are hesitant to seek or request support which may precipitate additional obstacles with their transitions. The findings of the study revealed a powerful connection linking proactive support and continuous follow to positive experiences and clarity regarding the transfer process. State universities should create processes for ensuring effective preemptive advising and success coaching practices that ensure reaching out to the students, intervening early, and following up before the transfer and during the first year at the state university. This is pivotal when working with transfer students who might present additional challenges on a personal and academic level. Reaching out to transfer students early on and, more importantly, continuing with the support after transferring and during their first year at the state university better prepare the students for the transition, mitigate potential obstacles, build connections and motivation, and equip them with the strategies and tools to be successful.

Moreover, this study is significant in promoting a better understanding of the transfer student experience especially non-traditional students who come to the university with life experience as well as many competing priorities. Ensuring that there is awareness of the non-traditional transfer students' needs and experiences is essential not only among support services but also amongst faculty. To this end, faculty members should develop better understanding and more empathy towards non-traditional students because they simply do not know what the students are going through and how challenging life could be for them. Mira, one of the participants in this study, was a veteran single mom battling depression, scarcity of financial resources, taking care of her two little kids, going to classes, and maintaining a job. Mira walked into one of her classes few minutes late for a test they were taking, she narrates:

This was a mixed mode class, and we were doing a test and the I had gotten there just a few minutes, like I want to say, 2 minutes after the class time had already started, we were taking a test. I had my scantron sheet in my hand. I just needed to get the actual test paper. So, I go up to the professor who is standing towards the side of the class, and I say, you know: good afternoon. I was wondering if I could have the test paper. And he's like, are you in my class? That was his response. Like, he didn't say good morning like I said, good morning, can I have one of the tests, please? And he's like, Are you in the class? And that shocked me. I was just sitting there like, wow, rude. Like, of course I'm in your class. Who would walk into a random class, walk up to the professor and be like, hey, can I have a test if you're not in the class?

Therefore, the faculty relationship and personalized communication with the non-traditional students is paramount in enhancing learning and giving a sense of belonging,

increasing motivation, engagement, and commitment. Professors' empathy and understanding help students going through rough times and reduces the feeling of isolation.

The findings further demonstrate that nontraditional students would benefit from support staff of coaches and advisors who understand their life experiences and their unique needs. The empathy and support the success coach showed Jake by relating to his life experience created a bond that motivated Jake to be more confident in returning to the state college and continuing his AA degree. When asked about the components that would have affected dramatically his academic and personal experience in his first year at the state university, Jake referred to the researcher affirming:

You! like somebody like you! somebody like you honestly you know what I'm saying.

It'd be nice if the system saw, you know my age or my experience as a non-traditional student, that there is like the coach I talked to before or another person like you that actually can feel what I'm feeling a little bit more.

This information has a direct effect on what constitutes effective support for non-traditional students. The findings generated from the data collected in this study suggest that for student support approaches to be efficacious, they should account for the unique personal and academic challenges, provide relevant information and supplementary resources, offer specialized sessions including during orientation, extend targeted and holistic support to achieve career goals, promote opportunities for engagement to increase sense of belonging, and improve upon processes to better serve this population.

Finally, establishing peer mentor programs would be beneficial for transfer students to feel more included and connected to campus. Several participants in this study have reported feeling lost, isolated, and alienated. Such programs would connect incoming transfer students at

the state college to students at the state university who have already gone through the process. This can be done on one-to-one basis or through several scheduled events. The purpose of this peer mentor program is to offer an opportunity for students embarking on this transition to ask the questions they are reluctant to ask staff members, gain support, receive information, and tap into the experiences of others who walked this path. Having peer mentors who represent them and embody shared experiences will be empowering for the incoming transfer students to get inspired and affirm that they can do it too despite challenges.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of transfer students in their first year at the state university with transfer and advising services they received before and during their first year to get an insight regarding the challenges they face and establish whether these services were effective in helping students overcome challenges. Data was collected through interviews with the participants and coded resulting in several themes to answer the two research questions. The findings of this study are significant to better understand the experiences of the transfer students, the challenges they face, and the tools and strategies they utilize to overcome barriers.

None the less, further research into this subject is warranted to collect quantitative data that investigates the relationship between receiving these support services and student retention and success. Using a quantitative research method, like a correlational research design, will be important to incorporate to examine the degree and direction to which transfer and support services are related to student academic performance, retention, and graduation. This type of research will complement the findings of this study by providing reliable and objective insights that would eliminate any potential researcher bias. The results of a quantitative study identifying

the trends and patterns that are more successful in supporting transfer students can be generalized on a broader scale among higher education institutions.

A potential limitation to this study is that participants in this study went through the transition during an unprecedented worldwide COVID-19 pandemic that forced everyone to be quarantined and all educational services and instruction to be conducted remotely. The circumstances surrounding their experiences were distorted by several adverse elements including staff shortages, high level of stress and uncertainty, physical and emotional concerns, financial risks, and ill-equipped higher education institutions that were compelled to depend on online for instruction and services. Another avenue of research may include exploring perceptions of transfer student participants who transferred from the state college to the state university after COVID has ended and campus services and instruction returned to face-to-face. This will be essential to determine if the pandemic affected the findings of this study especially as it relates to students' perceptions on the efficiency, effectiveness, and delivery of transfer and advising services.

Future research in this subject should include additional components. The interviews for this research study were conducted via Zoom, a virtual video platform, due to COVID. Further research opportunities can be conducted using face to face interviews instead of Zoom. While virtual meeting platforms are extremely convenient and flexible, face to face interviews allow for more personal connection, openness, and engagement. Additionally, this study included 11 participants which was a sufficient sample size for qualitative research. A sample size encompassing a larger pool of participants will be required for results to be statistically significant if quantitative research is sought. Finally, additional quantitative studies that include surveys to obtain further demographic characteristics of the participants are appropriate since

participants' demographics were deemed by the finding of this study important in how students reacted, coped, and mitigated the transition and all its challenges.

Conclusion

The findings of this study provided a better understanding of the perception of transfer students regarding transfer and advising services before the transfer and during their first year of study at the state university. It further described the numerous challenges associated with the transition and ways and means the participants have incorporated to mitigate and cope with these challenges. The perceptions of the participants of this study with transfer and advising services fluctuated significantly depending on the degree of assistance they have received. The more personalized support and follow up they receive, the more positive their perception is and better equipped they are to deal with the transition. The four S system or what is known as the Schlossberg's "4S's" referring to situation, self, support, and strategies was used to ascertain how the participants moved in, through, and out of the transition. To this effect, participants resorted to family, friends, other staff and professors, and online resources to help confront and overcome impediments associated with the transition. This chapter concluded by discussing implications for higher education institutions and recommendations for further research.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA

Institutional Review Board
FWA00000351
IRB00001138, IRB00012110
Office of Research
12201 Research Parkway
Orlando, FL 32826-3246

EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

June 22, 2022

Dear Mirvate El Jerdi:

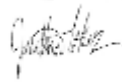
On 6/22/2022, the IRB determined the following submission to be human subjects research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review:	Initial Study, Initial Study
Title:	A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION OF TRANSFER STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES WITH COACHING AND ADVISING AT A LARGE METROPOLITAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITY
Investigator:	Mirvate El Jerdi
IRB ID:	STUDY00004340
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Documents Reviewed:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mirvate-signed HRP-251- FORM - Faculty Advisor Scientific-Scholarly Review fillable form.pdf, Category: Faculty Research Approval;• Email Invitations final.docx, Category: Recruitment Materials;• HRP-254-FORM Explanation of Research final.pdf, Category: Consent Form;• HRP-255-FORM - Request for Exemption Final.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;• semi-structured interview questions.docx, Category: Interview / Focus Questions

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made, and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please submit a modification request to the IRB. Guidance on submitting Modifications and Administrative Check-in are detailed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within the IRB system. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request so that IRB records will be accurate.

If you have any questions, please contact the UCF IRB at 407-823-2901 or irb@ucf.edu. Please include your project title and IRB number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Coker", with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Jonathan Coker
Designated Reviewer

APPENDIX B: EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH FORM



EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: A Phenomenological Exploration of Transfer Students' experiences with Coaching and Advising at a Large Metropolitan Research University

Principal Investigator: Mirvate El Jerdi

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Thomas Cox

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the experiences and perceptions of transfer students with the support services they received before and during their first year at a state university. Gaining in-depth insights of the transfer students' experiences is valuable to help identify gaps in the transfer process which would be fundamental for higher education institutions to improve upon policies, services, and practices to further enhance transfer student success rate especially that is related to state and federal funding.

As a participant in this study, you are being asked to complete an interview via Zoom. The interview will take around an hour to complete. Your virtual interview will be in a password protected meeting. The researcher will join the virtual interview from a private location to ensure privacy and prevent being overheard. We encourage you to do the same.

This interview will be audio and video recorded. The researcher will also write down her field notes and observation during the interview. The Zoom recording will be used for data analysis. The researcher will assign a pseudonym to your information, so that your answers, data file, and field notes will be kept confidential. The researcher will remove personal identifiers from the transcript of your interview and pseudonyms will be used on any reports. Only the researcher will have access to the fully identifiable recordings and transcripts. All data will be encrypted and stored in a password protected files on a UCF maintained server with limited access. Field notes will be stored separately from the deidentified data in a locked file cabinet. Per Florida law, all data collected will be kept for a minimum of 5 years after study closure. After which the data will be destroyed.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time without prejudice or penalty. Your decision to participate or not participate in this study will in no way affect your relationship with UCF, including continued enrollment, grades, employment, or your relationship with the individuals who may have an interest in this study.

Participants must be transfer students in their first year of study at UCF, earned an Associate in Arts degree at a state college, successfully completed sixty semester hours of college credit

courses, have a GPA of 2.0 and above, transferred to UCF through Direct Connect, utilized the transfer services before and after transferring, and be 18 or older.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints contact: Mirvate El Jerdi, Principal Investigator, Doctoral Candidate, Higher Education Leadership, College of Community Innovation and Education, (407) 823-2510, mirvate.eljerdi@ucf.edu or Dr. Thomas Cox, Associate Professor & Program Coordinator of Higher Education, Department of Educational Leadership and Higher Education, (407) 823-2881, thomas.cox@ucf.edu

IRB contact about your rights in this study or to report a complaint: If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or have concerns about the conduct of this study, please contact Institutional Review Board (IRB), University of Central Florida, Office of Research, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901, or email irb@ucf.edu.

APPENDIX C: EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

Invitation Email

Dear Student,

My name is Mirvate El Jerdi and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education track in the Educational Leadership EdD program. As part of fulfilling my dissertation requirement for my EdD degree, I am conducting a qualitative study to examine the experiences and perceptions of transfer students with the transfer services they received before and during their first year at UCF and I inviting you to participate in the study.

Your experience is valuable as understanding would help identify gaps in the transfer process which would be fundamental for higher education institutions to improve upon policies, services, and practices. I would like to collect your experiences in an interview over Zoom that will take less than an hour. The interview will be recorded for data analysis. Your answers will be kept confidential.

Participants must be 18 or older transfer students in their first year of study at UCF, have earned an Associate in Arts degree at a state college, have successfully completed sixty semester hours of college credit courses, have a GPA of 2.0 and above, have transferred to UCF through Direct Connect, and have utilized the transfer and advising services before and after transferring.

If you are willing to participate, please let me know with a reply to this email:

mirvate.eljerdi@ucf.edu and indicate the available days/times that would work for your interview.

Attached is a UCF document [HRP 254 Explanation of Research form] with further information.

Sincerely,

Mirvate El Jerdi

Principal Investigator

Reminder Email

Dear Student,

I recently invited you to participate in a qualitative research study on the experiences and perceptions of transfer students with the transfer and advising services they received before and during their first year at UCF. My records indicate that you have not signed up to participate.

Please note that the interview will be conducted online via Zoom and will take no more than an hour of your time.

As a reminder, you are eligible to participate if the following apply:

- Transfer students in your first year of study at UCF who are 18 or older
- Earned an associate in arts degree at a state college
- Completed sixty semester hours of college credit courses
- Have a GPA of 2.0 and above
- Transferred to UCF through Direct Connect
- Utilized the transfer and advising services before and after transferring

This is a friendly reminder to respond by emailing: Mirvate.eljerdi@ucf.edu if you have not done so already. As a Doctoral Candidate collecting data for my dissertation, I am very appreciative of your time!

Sincerely,

Mirvate El Jerdi

Principal Investigator

Confirmation Email

Dear Student,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research. I look forward to learning about your experience during our upcoming interview.

I look forward to seeing you on (insert day and date) at (insert time). I have sent you a calendar invite with meeting details. Here is the zoom link for the interview:

Sincerely,

Mirvate El Jerdi

Principal Investigator

Thank you for participating Email

Dear student,

I just want to thank you again for participating in my study. I enjoyed getting to know you and learn about your experiences with transfer and advising services. Once I complete my study, I will be happy to share the results.

Sincerely,

Mirvate El Jerdi

Principal Investigator

Email for Not Selected Volunteer

Dear Student,

Thank you for expressing interest in taking part in my research study on the lived experiences of transfer students with the transfer and advising services they received before and after their transition to UCF.

At this time, I already have the required number of participants to run the study. If something should change, I will let you know.

Thank you again,

Mirvate El Jerdi

Principal Investigator

Member Checking

Dear student,

I want to thank you again for participating in my study. I enjoyed getting to know you and learning about your experiences with transfer and advising services. Please find attached a copy of the interview transcript data for your review. Please check for accuracy and edit, clarify, and elaborate as you deem needed. Also review my summary at the end of the transcript to verify if the data was accurately viewed and understood by me.

Please respond to this email before

If no changes are made, please respond by saying that no changes have not been made and information is accurate.

Sincerely,
Mirvate El Jerdi
Principal Investigator

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of transfer students at a 4-year public research institution in Florida to get an insight regarding the obstacles they faced and determine whether support services they received were effective in helping them overcome challenges.

Data	Question	Prompts & elicitations
To break the ice and provide some background.	Would you like to share which college/program of study you are in and how did you decide on your field of study?	How, when and where did the participant meet with a success coach or advisor?
Experience with support services in general at the state college before they transferred	<p>What support services have you utilized?</p> <p>Please tell me about your experiences with the success coaching or the support services you received before you started at this university?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you meet with a success coach at the state college? • Ask student to elaborate on the support received through giving specific examples • 'What did you mean...?' or 'Can you give more details...?'
Experience with support services in general at the university after they transferred	<p>What support services have you utilized?</p> <p>Please tell me about your experiences with the success coaching or the support services you received after you started at this university?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you meet with a success coach/advising at the state university? • Ask student to elaborate on the support received through giving specific examples • 'What did you mean...?' or 'Can you give more detail...?'

Coaching-Academic advising and career goals	Please tell me about your experience with the assistance with your academic and career objectives before and after you transferred.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What assistance did you receive in exploring career interest? • What assistance did you receive in exploring majors that align with your career goals? • What activities and academic and occupational assessments were you engaged in? Were results evaluated and used in selecting majors? •
Coaching-Advising services and major exploration	Please tell me about your experience with the guidance you received on choosing major before and after you transferred.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What assistance did you receive in exploring the majors at the state university? • What resources have you received on program offering? • Where you able to get into your program of choice?
Coaching-Advising services and class selection	Please tell me about your experience with the assistance you received with course selection in your first year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did you register for classes based on convenience, interest, best professor, or because they are core requirements/ required GED? • What resources were you provided with to identify/decide on courses that align with your selected majors and based on completed/transferred credits?

Coaching -Advising and university policies and procedures	Please tell me about your experience with the assistance you received to be familiar with the university's policies and procedures in your first year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What policies and procedures were explained/ introduced to you? • Attendance • GPA requirement • Plagiarism
Coaching -Advising personal and family circumstances	Please tell me about your experience with the assistance you received to support with personal challenges in your first year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible schedules • Class modalities • Resources and follow up
Coaching -Advising and financial barriers	Please tell me about your experience with the assistance you received regarding financial assistance, financial aid, or other resources available in your first year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connect to resources • Financial literacy programs
Coaching -Advising and psychological /emotional challenges	Please tell me about your experience with the assistance you received when it comes to dealing with psychological /emotional challenges in your first year.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transfer shock • Anxiety • isolation
Support services and areas for improvement	What kind of support you think would have been helpful for you to have received?	
Support Services and their overall experience	How would receiving these services affected your academic and personal experience in the first year?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better grades • Clear academic expectations • Better adjustment

Member-checking.	<p>Paraphrase to validate information:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1- Academic support services they have received 2- Experience with choosing academic, personal, financial, and emotional challenges 3- How support services they have received affect their experience in their first year at a 4 year state university <p>Ask for a response.</p>	
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